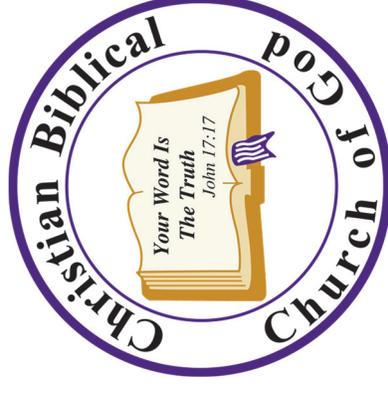


# Is the Ministry God's Government?

by  
*Fred R. Coulter*



With a special treatise on:

## *The Nicolaitans* of Revelation 2

by J. H. Allen

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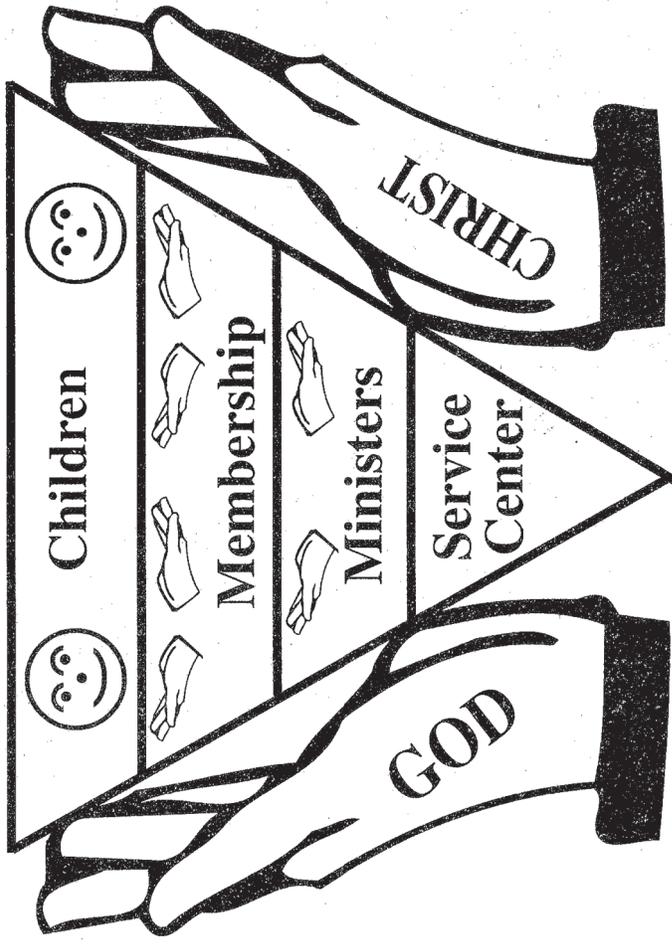
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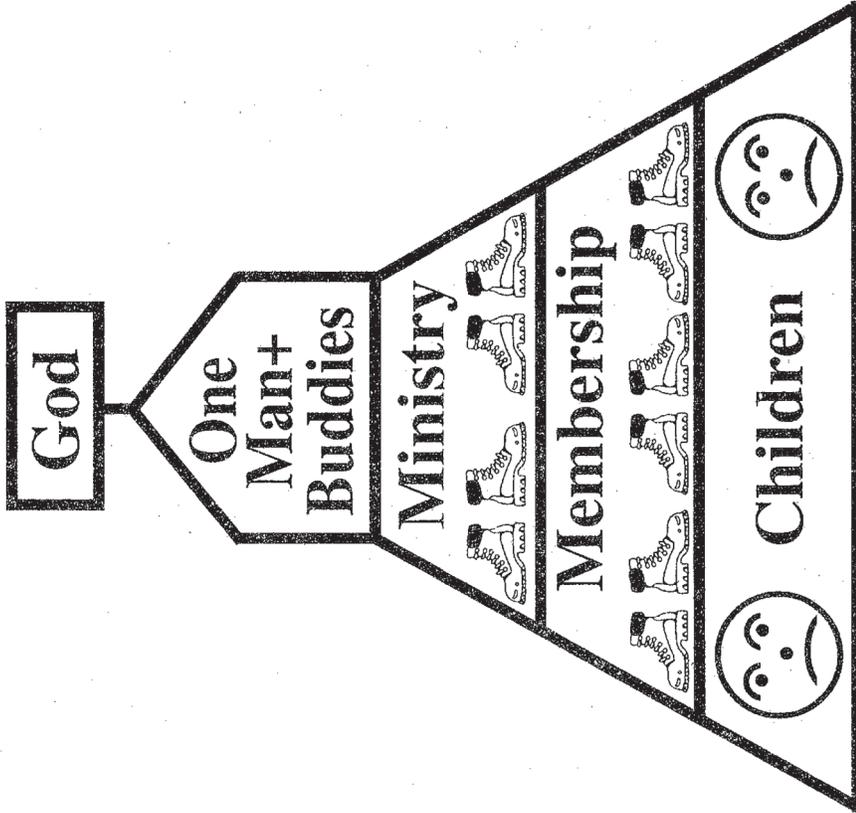
*Is the Ministry God's Government?*



**Government Was Made for Man**

The *membership* is the heart of the Church—not the ministry. Ministers hold up parents instead of putting them down. Children grow in respect for their parents as they see others show them respect. Each layer *gives* to the higher layer instead of taking from the lower layer. All are encouraged to draw closer to God without a middleman.

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*Have you been impacted by strict authoritarian rule through a Church of God organization?*

*Did you know that this kind of control was gained through SLEIGHT OF HAND?*

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*Read this booklet to learn about this great and subtle deception.*

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**Man Was Made for Government**

Top-down government is very efficient. It is used around the world because it is so good at controlling people. Each layer oppresses the layer below it. Ministers act like kings instead of servants. They become obstacles between God and the membership, inhibiting real spiritual growth.

## *Is the Ministry God's Government?*

house. But you are cast out of your grave *like* a hateful branch, *and like* the clothing of those who are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; like a dead body trampled under foot" (Isa. 14:12-19).

Note how the process took place—the motive that developed and the "MO" Satan used:

"You *were* the anointed cherub that covers, and I set you so; you were upon the holy mountain [government] of God; you have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire [morning stars]. You *were* perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you. By the multitude of your merchandise they have filled your midst *with* violence, and you have sinned. Therefore I will cast you as profane from the mountain of God, and I will destroy you, O covering cherub, from among the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness. I will cast you to the ground; I will lay you before kings, that they may behold you. By the multitude of your iniquities, by the unrighteousness of your trade, you have profaned your sanctuaries; therefore I brought forth a fire from your midst; it shall devour you, and I will bring you to ashes upon the earth, before the eyes of all who see you. All who know you among the people shall be astonished at you; you became a terror, and you *will* not *be* any more" (Ezek. 28:14-19).

*A closing thought:* The Father and Christ are God, and thus our Superiors; but we are *all brethren* (see Matt. 23:8-11). Also, each saint is a Spirit-filled *priest* of God: "But you *are* a chosen stock, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession *of God*, that you might proclaim His *excellent* virtues, Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once *were* not a people, but now are the people of God... (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

\* \* \* \*

*Note:* This paper on the Nicolaitans has been marginally edited for clarity and style; the original *KJV* passages have been replaced using *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order*.

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and the great ones exercise authority over them. However, it shall not be this way among you; but whoever would become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever would 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 as a ransom for many' ” (Matt. 20:25-28).

Notice how the Father exalted this greatest of all Servants: “Let each one look not *only* after his own things, but *let* each one also *consider* the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which *was* also in Christ Jesus; Who, although He existed in *the* form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, and was made in the likeness of men, and took the form of a servant; and being found in the manner of man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God has also highly exalted Him and bestowed upon Him a name which *is* above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *beings* in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord to the glory of God *the* Father” (Phil. 2:4-11).

By contrast, who was the first despot? Satan the devil. He was created to serve as the prodigy of Yehovah—to serve like the pre-incarnate Christ (see Isa. 11:1). Notice Isaiah 14:

“How you are fallen from the heavens, O shining star, son of the morning! *How* you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart, ‘I will ascend *into* the heavens, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to the grave, to the sides of the pit. Those who see you shall stare and watch you closely, *saying*, ‘Is this the man who made the earth to tremble; who shook kingdoms; *who* made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed its cities; *who* did not allow his prisoners to go free?’ All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own

## Is the Ministry God's Government?

Many of the people I associate with have, like myself, come out of a tightly controlled church of God. The experience of being under *strict authority* has left a lingering impact upon us. Anyone who has experienced this can relate to what I am saying.

Have you personally been impacted by an overly-strict church of God ministry? Was the effect good—or bad? Does it still influence your life?

Let's look at some of the ways in which we were impacted. Some were quite subtle, yet damaging—and have unfortunately left brethren with wounded souls.

### How Do Jesus Christ and God the Father View the Church of God?

All of the scriptures I will be covering have been used to validate *human* church hierarchical authority—such as in the Catholic Church. But when you examine them carefully, they prove the exact opposite!

“And I say also to you, that you are Peter; but upon this Rock I will build My church...” (Matt. 16:18).

We know that *Rock* refers to Christ, not to Peter or any man. We know that Jesus said, “I will build My church.” Those who are called by Jesus are called “My sheep,” and “My brethren.” I want to emphasize that Jesus was saying “My church.”

“I will build My church, and *the* gates of the grave shall not prevail against it.”

The word *hell*, as the *KJV* renders it, is not referring to a place of ever-burning fire, but is from the Greek *hades*, meaning the *grave*. In other words, the Church of which Christ is the head *would never die out*.

### **Baptism Into Jesus Christ**

Jesus commanded: "Therefore, go *and* make disciples in all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, *even* until the completion of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).

The "end of the world," as in the *KJV*, means the end of the *age*. The Church age will close at the first resurrection. The age of the Kingdom of God will start when the seven last plagues begin.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached: "Repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for *the* remission of sins, and you yourselves shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

The Holy Spirit comes from God the Father. We were told that the Church is the bride of Christ and that the Church is the mother of us all—the Church is the Body of Christ. We were also told that all of the different churches in the world could not be part of the Body of Christ.

The apostle Paul wrote: "For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the one body, though many, are one body; so also *is* Christ. For indeed, by one Spirit [the Holy Spirit from God] we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or free—and we were all made to drink into one Spirit" (I Cor. 12:12-13).

Each of us was baptized into God's Church after repenting of our sins (*sin* is the transgression of God's holy, righteous, and perfect law). We also accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master, our High Priest in heaven, and the soon-coming King in the World Tomorrow. We were *not* baptized into any *sect* or *denomination* of this world—or any organization of men—but into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in the name of Christ for the remission of our sins. We were completely immersed in water, then raised up, out of that "watery

Furthermore, Webster defines the word *episcopal* as "the power of government, belonging to, or invested in, bishops or prelates. Government of the church by bishops." Also, "In episcopacy, the order of bishops is superior to the other clergy, and has exclusive power to confer orders." In this definition it is affirmed that a certain portion of presbyters (elders) were, even in apostolic times, "superior in authority to ordinary presbyters." Moreover, episcopacy recognizes "episcopal rank," which is created by the institution thus governed—all of which affirms that any church in which [exists an] episcopal government is practicing the very carnal and fleshly iniquity of creating "superiors" in what should be a holy brotherhood.

The use of this appellation makes "inferiors" out of brethren who are in the selfsame clergy. The approbation of "ordinary elders" demands a set of elders who are super-ordinary, thus creating *rank* (caste) in the otherwise divine brotherhood, all of which destroys holy fellowship, creates division and strife, and fosters envy. No marvel that our Lord should hate a thing like that, condemn it, and demand that those who are guilty shall repent.

But will they? Yes, some will when the tribulation is on. Others, however, will stick to their ecclesiastical crowd, vainly imagining that their boasted "superiority" will carry them through that time of the greatest trouble the world has ever known, or will know. They must go down with the rest of the hosts of the antichrist.

And yet, one of the most unfortunate features of all this is that there are those in the Christian church who do not hold to the *doctrine* of the Nicolaitans, but who practice their *deeds* of dominating the laity by lording it over the Church of Jesus Christ, which should be subject only to one divine Master. It is often true that these have assumed this lordship because they are esteemed very highly in love for their work's sake, but have become vainly puffed up in their fleshly mind. Beloved, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees."

Christ's attitude toward *service* is to be our attitude: "But Jesus called them to *Him and* said, 'You know that the rulers of the nations exercise lordship over them,

as the Greek *k* is the equivalent the English *c*. Thus, in the name *Laodiceans*, we have *laos* (people) and *dice* (judgment or vengeance)—i.e., the “people of my judgment” (or of my vengeance). Also, the Greek word *la(ic)os* means *laymen*, of which *laos* is the root and stem, which the selfsame word—with the short *o* contracted to *i*, to which the root and stem and the plural definite article *ton* is joined to form *laiton*—is a Greek phrase meaning “the laity.”

The **third** and last word entering into the construction of the proper name Nicolaitan is *ton*, in which omega, the long *o*, is contracted into a long *a*, thus making the word *tan*, which is the genitive case plural in all the genders of the definite article *the*. Therefore, we have, without the legal Greek construction, the English hyphenated word Nickos-laos-ton, but which, with its lawful elisions and contractions, becomes the English name *Nicolaitan*. The full meaning of which, in its native tongue and in its ecclesiastical setting, is that the bishops and prelates of the church have gained a triumphal victory or conquest over the laiton—the laity—until they have been compelled to submit to the arbitrary dominion of men who have become that thing which God hates: “Lords over God’s heritage.”

The evidence of this is found in all our common school dictionaries, among which we find the following definition of the term *hierarchy*: “the power of dominion, government by ecclesiastical rulers,” to which the following is introduced in evidence:

“If anyone shall say that there is not in the Catholic Church a hierarchy established by the divine ordination, consisting of bishops, presbyters and ministers, let him be anathema” (Council of Trent XXIII 6; see *Century Dictionary*.) In other words, let anyone who will have the temerity to say there is not a hierarchy—not a collection of human beings who have been given the power, by other men of dominion, as ecclesiastical rulers over churchmen, who are declaredly God’s heritage—let that man be accursed, i.e., let death and hell and the devil get him. Surely, the thing in which that ecclesiastical company is glorying is their shame!

grave.” Then we were prayed over with the “laying on of hands” in order to receive the Holy Spirit.

We were told that the Church of God is a *spiritual* organization. *True*. It is likened to the Body of Christ, and Christ is the Head of the Church. *True*.

Next, we were told that the “*corporate* church organization” we were now part of was the *only true* Church of God. This was a *sleight of hand*—a *false* teaching.

### **Is Church Authority the Government of God?**

What happened after baptism? We assembled with other baptized believers in various congregations; in time we were introduced to the “government of God” or “church authority”—that is, the *ministry*. This was a *sleight of hand*.

We were told that the ministers of the Church had *rule* over our lives. As time went on, that rule became more and more *stifling*. We were slowly conditioned to allow the ministry to *think for us*. But it ran deeper than that. We were told that if we left the authoritarian rule of the church, *we would lose our salvation*.

We were originally told that the church was a *spiritual organism*. We were also told that it was possible that there could be people sitting in the “one true Church of God” who did not have the Spirit of God. Thus, these people were *not* truly a part of God’s Church. So even though an individual might be a member of a *congregation* of the Church of God, he or she must have the Holy Spirit in order to truly be *in* the Church of God.

But we were *ruled over* by the “church government,” meaning the whole ministry, with authority from the top down. We were told that the *ministry* was the “government of God.” This was a *sleight of hand*! Those in authority twisted the Scriptures in order to uphold their authority. The fact is, the *ministry* is **NOT** the “government of God.” The ministry is supposed to *serve* the people, not rule as overlords or dictators.

**What Then Is the True "Government of God"?**

The true "government of God" is the *rule of God* in our lives as we are led by the Holy Spirit. Also, the "government of God" is going to be the rule of Christ through the Kingdom of God on earth when He returns. The ministry has *usurped* God's own authority and, contrary to Scripture, has made it their own. The "corporate church" leadership has taken upon themselves the government of God. With that very act, they have supplanted God—though they may not have fully comprehended their actions.

In doing so, they took advantage of the Church membership. Yet at baptism, each one of us said to God, "You will rule my life." In other words, we are dedicated to *God*—not to an over-lording ministry that has usurped the authority of Christ!

**Love Toward God Transferred to Men**

The next *sleight of hand* was the taking of the love, loyalty, and faith that we give to God and to the brethren and *transferring it to men* in leadership positions. Those same men then exercised hierarchical lordship and authority over the brethren. Such rule is contrary to Jesus Christ's direct command:

"And there was also an argument among them, *even* this: which of them should be considered *the* greatest. And He [Jesus] said to them, 'The kings of the nations lord over [*kata-kurieuo*] them, and those who exercise authority [*kata-exousiazō*] over them are called benefactors. But *it shall* not be this way *among* you; rather, let the one who is greatest among you be as the younger, and the one who is leading as the one who is serving.'" (Luke 22:24-26).

*Kata-kurieuo* means to exercise lordship downward from the top. Likewise, *kata-exousiazō* means to exercise authority from the top down.

Master. It is this aspiration on the part of men to become *lords* over God's heritage that God hates. The "doctrine of the Nicolaitans" (Rev. 2:6, 15) is just what the word *Nicolaitan* itself declares.

**The Meaning of Nicolaitan**

1) In the book of the revelation of Jesus Christ, it is both the Nicolaitans' *deeds* and *doctrine* that afflicts those in the two "churches" specified in Revelation 2:6 and 15. The Lord demands repentance on the part of those who hold and practice these things and He threatens drastic punishment if they do not obey Him: "Repent! For if you do not *repent*, I will come to you quickly, and will make war against them with the sword of My mouth" (Rev. 2:16).

2) The name *Nicolaitan* is a compound word composed of three Greek words, which, because of being a proper noun, is transferred instead of being translated into English. As thus transferred, it is subject to the laws of Greek construction in regard to ellipsis, contraction, and phonetics.

3) The Greek words used in its construction are **first**: *nikos*, of which we use the English equivalents instead of the Greek letters, as we shall also of the other two. *Nikos* is defined as "a conquest; victory; triumph; the conquered; and by implication, dominancy over the defeated." Another transferred name in which this term is used is *nicopolis*—that is, *niko* (conquest) with *polis* (city). Hence, the "city of conquest," or "city of victory." Also *andro-nikos*—a man of conquest, of victory.

The **second** term used in the name under consideration is *laos*—*people*, another use of which is *Nicolas*, which is transferred and is composed of *nikos* and *laos* and means one who is "victorious over the people"—the letter *s* being, in both words, the nominative case ending, which is retained only at the end of the word to denote the case, while the short *a* and the short *o* are contracted into a long *a*. Also, a still further transferred use of *laos* is found in the name *Lao(s)diceans*, compounded with *dike* or *dice*,

body of Christ, to call you “master.” Also, added to the carnal desire to be *uppermost* in the eyes of the Lord’s people, these leaders were charged with extortion and accused of devouring the homes of widows—and of excess. Jesus accused them of being hypocrites who aspired to be regarded as dignitaries of the congregations of the Most High God. Such conditions as described exist only in the assemblies across whose ethical portals, before the God of holiness, has been written the name *Ichabod*—“the glory of the Lord has departed.” The word *excess*, as used above, means the carnal abuse of lawful things—things lawful and right carried to extremes. For it is true that there is a legal and God-approved honor given to certain selected ones: “Now we beseech you, brethren, to acknowledge those who are laboring among you, and are overseeing you, and are instructing you in *the* Lord, and to greatly respect them in love for the sake of their work. Be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess. 5:12-13). “Let the *ordained* elders who are leading [not *ruling*] well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who are laboring in *the* Word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17).

Why *guide* and *lead*, instead of rule? Because those who are over us in the Lord are shepherds who must lead and guide, *but not dominate*. Rule is arbitrary government, and the Church may be “subject to Christ” only. “One is your Master, even Christ.” The following divine instruction is from one of the inspired, Spirit-filled elders: “*The* elders who *are* among you I exhort, even as a fellow elder, and an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that is about to be revealed. Feed the flock of God *that is* among you, exercising oversight [not rulership] not by compulsion, but willingly; not in fondness of dishonest gain, but *with an eager attitude*; not as exercising lordship over your possessions; but by being examples to the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:1-3).

The “blind guides” would *say*, but not *do*. The divinely-anointed elder will both *say* and *do*, and thus be an example to the flock, whom the people will love and esteem very highly for his work’s sake, and who in his heart will never desire to be *lord* over the heritage of his

The ministry was considered our benefactors even as they leveraged this authority to themselves! But Christ does not want the love, dedication, faith, and loyalty that belongs to God given to a *man*!

Why does God not want such authority leveraged to a man? Because people would then be worshipping a man—who becomes an *idol* in the place of God. Now we are getting to the crux of the issue. Why does God not want the ministry to leverage the love, faith, loyalty, and dedication that you give to God? Because *men* would be taking God’s place. And when men take God’s place, what happens? You serve men and you have created a pope, a man *in place of God* on earth.

We had abusive ministerial authority exercised over us—yet we were told that these men were our benefactors. Such authority leveraged subtly into the hands of men was devastating to the brethren—because we had committed ourselves to God, *not men*.

### **God Is a Jealous God**

This abusive authority was a tremendous sin against the membership and against God. God says we are to have *no other gods* before Him. He is a jealous God. What does God want from you? Notice: “‘And you shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This *is the* first commandment” (Mark 12:30).

When the love that should *only* go to God is leveraged to a man or an organization, it causes you to love God less; that special love has been diverted—but it belongs to God. Clearly, the *vanity* of the ministry had become involved, as evidenced by the authority exercised upon the members. Once you allow someone to redirect your love and loyalty to God, you are no longer keeping the first commandment. Remember, God is a jealous God. He called you, and Christ died for you. He doesn’t want anything or *anyone* interfering with that love.

What happens when men appropriate this love and devotion to themselves? *They organize it.* This became clear to me when I attended a secular business conference. The meeting was much like the ministerial conferences I had attended in the past. The corporate leaders had all of their people in attendance. The corporation was divided into regions, with all the national and international leadership. I was sitting in the middle of it when all of a sudden my church experience became *crystal clear*. Like any modern corporation, the ministry had assigned to the “church corporation” the prerogatives, loyalty, and love of God—all of which should have gone only to God. Thus, by superimposing a worldly “corporate structure” upon the church, they corrupted the pure way of God. This was a *sleight of hand!*

But God is not going to let anyone take *what is His* without a penalty.

The statement that there is “only one church on the face of the earth” is true. But the claim “Our church of God, this organization, is the only true church of God” is false. It may be a church of God, but not exclusively *the* Church of God. As time went on, it was implied that if you left this church organization, you left God. This would be a true statement if you left God the Father and Jesus Christ. But leaving an organization of *men* is altogether different. This is how the *prerogatives of God* were leveraged to the corporate church organization. Very subtle! “If you leave this church of God you have left *God*.”

The *fear* of church authority and the ministry replaced the fear and love of God. A corporate idol was created.

### **The Intimidation of Fear Religion**

With such control and authority over you, your freedom of *thought* disappears. People became fearful, and were intimidated as the ministry exercised “lordship” and “authority” over them. Yet we were warned to never

From the author of *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright...*

## **The Nicolaitans**

by J. H. Allen

When our Lord Jesus Christ walked among men, He taught His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, whom He denounced as hypocrites. With them He classed the chief priests and officials of the Temple, together with the recognized teachers (scribes or “professors”—Fenton Translation) in the synagogues. He declared they had so corrupted the truth of God, which they were supposed to preach, with the doctrines and ordinances of men, that the truth, as originally given, was no longer with them. That which these “blind leaders of the blind” were giving forth as truth of God was making their converts twofold more the children of hell than they were before accepting [the ideas of] these corrupt teachers.

Therefore, as a warning to those who were joining themselves to Him, the Lord said that these non-spiritual men made long prayers for a *pretense*, a public show—which, while having a form of humility, was for the purpose only of being *seen of men*. What these men really loved were the highest seats in the synagogues, the uppermost rooms at the public feasts, and the greetings they received in the marketplaces from truly humble and sincere men, whom they hoped would esteem them as superiors and who addressed them as *Rabbi, Rabbi*, “my master, my master.” But our Lord commanded: “But you are not to be called Rabbi; for one is your Master, the Christ, and all of you are brethren.... Neither be called Master; for one is your Master, the Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matt. 23:8-11).

This was a double command for a double purpose:

- Do not allow *men*, who are your brethren in Christ and who compose the assembly of God, to call you *master*—for one alone is your Master.
- Do not allow yourself to become possessed with such a carnal spirit that you want men, who belong to the

### **Background to this Booklet**

The original source material for this booklet is a sermon titled "Sleight of Hand" by Fred R. Coulter. Coulter was ordained a minister of Jesus Christ in 1965. He has pastored churches of God all over the western United States. Currently, Coulter is pastor of the Christian Biblical Church of God (CBCG) with its headquarters in Hollister, California. He publishes several books a year and maintains several well-read Web sites (see listing on back cover).

If you have benefited from this booklet, we recommend you request Fred Coulter's sermons "*Invisible Idol—Visible Man*" and "*Why God Hates Hierarchy*."

If you have felt that others have tried to change your foundational beliefs, please write for the book *Lord, What Should I Do?*

criticize the ministry. Essentially, we were told, our only duty was to *pray* and to *pay*. But when we bring an offering or a tithe to God, should it not be from the heart instead of *motivated by fear*?

The ministry had clearly taken upon itself the prerogatives of God. But if you were to say anything against a minister, you were considered to be on the verge of committing the "unpardonable sin." We were also warned not to say anything against the leaders at headquarters, who were the "government of God" on earth. If we did, we were talking against *God*. Indeed, the ministry had fully put itself in the place of God—through *sleight of hand*.

This all created such absolute fear. You feared the minister—feared being "put out." And you feared leaving the church. You couldn't trust your own thoughts, ideas, and conclusions; you couldn't trust God. You were brainwashed into putting all your trust in *men*.

Many who left that church of God organization were told that they had *lost their salvation*. Moreover, they were told that *if* they were going to get into the Kingdom of God, they would have to go through the horror of the Great Tribulation—another *sleight of hand*. The threat of loss of life and salvation is devastating and fearful.

### **A Main Appeal of Evangelism**

How exactly were people drawn to this particular church? One of the main appeals of the evangelical outreach utilized was to offer a way to *escape* the Great Tribulation. One of the primary magazine articles of the day was, "There Is a Way of Escape!"

Think about it: Doesn't everyone want to save his or her own skin? When you were told there was a "way of escape," didn't you *want* to escape? And when you came into the church, one of the first sermons that really captured your imagination featured the following passage:

"Watch therefore, *and pray* at all times that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that

shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).

Ministers frequently gave detailed sermons on the "place of safety," understood to be in Petra. And if you got to go to Petra, you had it made—salvation was assured.

The promise of personal escape was another *sleight of hand*. God will provide a way of escape, because God does the calling; and for those who truly repent, love God, keep His commandments, and live His way of life, they will be given spiritual salvation.

But you were also told that if you *left* this corporate structure, you were *not* going to escape the Great Tribulation. This became another *hook* put into you by the ministry. Do you see how subtly these things were done? Another hook was presented as the solution to your financial problems: tithing—first, second, third, and generous offerings.

But the idea of an escape from the Great Tribulation does not balance logically with biblical passages showing that true Christians *are* going to suffer for Christ. In effect, the message preached was: If you tithe faithfully and give abundant offerings to the church, you could *buy* a way of escape and salvation. These were not the exact words. But it was implied that if you didn't tithe, and if you didn't give all that you could, you surely wouldn't be protected.

There are people who are still locked into this fear-induced mindset. They are so locked into this idea that they are afraid to think for themselves. In other words, they have left their brains at the church door, and have never picked them up again.

### **How Dangerous Can this Fear Be?**

I remember when a famous traveling evangelist from this church organization came out to our local church area. The service was held in a local YMCA on a

Why? For what purpose? Notice: "...for the perfecting of the saints, for *the* work of *the* ministry, for *the* edifying of the body of Christ..." (verse 12).

Did you get that? For the *perfecting* of the saints—making them whole, mature in Christ. So the work of the ministry is *service oriented*. They are to edify the body of Christ—to lovingly teach and build up the brethren. Verse 13: "Until we all"—*everyone* in the Church—"come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [spiritually mature] man, unto *the* measure of *the* stature of the fullness of Christ."

This is a huge job—and it cannot be done if the "prerogatives of God" have been leveraged to human beings or to corporate church organizations. When men take the prerogatives of God to themselves, they reject the true purpose of the ministry. But we can learn and grow only if we are looking *directly* to Jesus Christ and God the Father—rather than to men or an organization.

Verse 14: "So that we no longer be [spiritually immature] children, tossed and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men in *cunning craftiness*, with a view to the systematizing of the error..."

Here is what Christ really wants: "But holding the truth in love, [so that we] may in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, *even* Christ, from Whom all the body, fitly framed and compacted together by *that which* every joint supplies, according to *its* inner working in *the* measure of each individual part, is making the increase of the body unto *the* edifying of itself in love" (verses 15-16)

*That* is the correct church structure. We must not allow the structure of the administration to *interfere* with the first commandment of loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and being. For only then can we attain to the full knowledge and measure of the stature of Christ.

solve such problems was to get back to the first commandment of loving God—and structure everything around *that*.

Our former church became a movement because we wanted to do a “work” for God, rather than letting God show us *what work we should do*. We trusted in our own devices and our own thoughts. And that “movement” became a *monument*—a false god of human government. Thus, it was doomed to failure.

### **What Does God Want?**

We began to see for the first time what God wants: We are to do nothing that will keep people from loving God. This is the key. Any organizational structure should be set up to accomplish whatever tasks need to be done, but the task is not a matter of salvation! Is typing a matter of salvation? No. Is writing a matter of salvation? No. Is where you live a matter of salvation? No. Is what you do for your *job* a matter of salvation? No, not as long as you are able to love God and keep His commandments.

Before it fell into complete apostasy, God allowed our former affiliation to preach the basics. Since then, many brethren have left that church organization, but do not understand what went wrong. As a result, many are wandering about like wounded, scattered sheep.

What a shame that our former church deteriorated into such a mess. In order for us to learn the love of God, it seems that we must sometimes move to another church of God—where we can see firsthand what it is like to truly love God and one another.

### **Purpose for the Church of God**

Paul was inspired to define the purpose of the Church and the ministry: “And He gave [set or established] some as apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers...” (Eph. 4:11).

hot summer evening, with no air conditioning and the windows open. While the evangelist was preaching, there was a loud screeching of tires and a crashing sound. There had been a collision right outside the window.

Due to natural reaction, everyone turned to look at the accident. Maybe someone had been hurt. Maybe we could have helped. But the evangelist said, “How dare you look at the wreck; what I am saying is more important. You listen to what I have to say. Don’t any of you dare look out there.” The brethren were fearful; they sat obediently looking forward with their eyes wide open. He later said, “Brethren, with all this church trouble we have been having, I want to tell you that our church leader may be 95 percent wrong and you may be 95 percent right, but God is going to uphold him and not you! You will be cast into the lake of fire for rebelling against God’s government!”

### **Fear Destroys Truth**

By now you can begin to understand the problems that occurred when these God-prerogatives were leveraged by the ministry. The brethren knew that they had to “obey” the ministers, and that they had better attend church. Otherwise they would get a phone call asking, “Where have you been and what have you been doing?” (Attendance was secretly taken each week.)

To keep everyone involved, congregations had so many activities that the members’ free time was typically spent at church activities. In addition to Sabbath services there were sports activities on Sunday, Bible Study on Wednesday, Spokesman Club one night of the week, and numerous other obligations. It often amounted to seven days a week. In addition, deacons and local elders had other church-related meetings to attend.

Because brethren were fearful of losing their salvation, they would end up being fully involved in the church. But how is the Church of God supposed to be *held together*? Is it to be held together with “command and

control tactics" exercised by ministers? The Bible shows that the Church is to be *knit together in love*. Instead, the ministry tried to hold the Church together by authority and intimidation.

No wonder so many asked, "God, why am I so miserable in this church?"

The leadership violated the very first commandment by leveraging the members' love for God to themselves. It was so subtle. Then they replaced God's love with their own authority.

### **Correct Church Structure**

What is the correct "organizational structure" for the Church? The only structure needed is one that *meets the needs* of the congregation—such as securing a place to meet, printing booklets and magazines, distribution and mailing, etc. But the organization should never take to itself the love of God. It should never tolerate usurping the prerogatives of God and applying them to the corporation or to an individual leader.

There was also a glaring problem with the church's college. Not everyone who attended was taken into the "Work" or into the ministry. If a person wasn't hired by the church after graduation, they were looked upon as an outcast. This is because the goal of "working for the church" had had become paramount in everyone's minds.

If a certain person was not proficient in doing a certain task, they should have been transferred or released from that position—with *love and God's blessing*. It should never have been forced upon them as a "do or die" situation.

Many graduates would leave the church's college feeling like whipped dogs. They were people with ability, but made to feel like failures. This was because being hired as part of the "Work" was made into a sort of false god. It was virtually viewed as a matter of salvation, when

it should have been viewed as a matter of individual aptitude concerning a specific job.

### **"Committee Structure" Did Not Solve the Problem**

When I was involved some years later in organizing another church of God, our constitution and by-laws turned out to be our own death warrant. It was quickly apparent that we had failed to learn from our prior experiences. We started out loving God and doing what we should. But we soon became "organized" to the point that the corporate structure took us away from loving and serving God. We failed even more miserably than our former affiliation. This was partly because we were much smaller, but also because we had utilized committees.

Instead of having a dictatorship of one man, we had dictatorship by committee. Such committees were composed of men who believed they sat in the *seat* of God. In time they made *judgments*, not only for matters of "right or wrong," but on whether one's *heart* was right with God. But this is something only God can know!

How would you feel if you had *deeply repented in your heart and mind*—only to be told it was unacceptable? This is exactly what these committees did, sitting in the "seat of God."

### **Wrong Answer to the Problems**

The mistake we made in forming *that* church was believing that the problems in our former corporate church were primarily *structure* related. By changing the structure from one-man-rule to rule-by-committee, we believed such problems would be eliminated. But we failed to understand that structural changes do nothing to *change human nature*.

Indeed, our real problem *was* human nature. We could not eliminate the problems of our former church by simply changing to a different structure. The *only way* to