

“ I Am of Paul, I Am of Apollos! ”

Despite Pointed and Direct Scriptural Mention, the Church of God Continues to Suffer the Effects of a Contaminant Brought into it By Our Basic Natures, Except that Today, We See the Phenomenon Developed to an Extreme!

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The Apostle Paul encountered many internal problems in the congregations with which he had contact. Not the least of which is the one he carefully addressed in his first letter to the Church at Corinth. We find counterparts of this same characteristic alive and well in the Church of God today. In fact, it is one that has done more to counteract the Church's health and the effectiveness of its world reaching ministry than perhaps any other!

In the first three chapters of First Corinthians, he focuses on an emerging defect in the congregation, one which was causing a degree of **division** among them.¹ That divisive mentality was mostly political, but a side component carried with that was the potential for doctrinal diversity. This potential was Paul's main concern. It could develop into error in time. Their problem was, members within the congregation were polarizing behind their various favorite ministers. They liked his style, they liked his presentation, they identified with his personal intellectual approach, his way of thinking! Each, it seemed, had his favorite teacher, based not on doctrinal considerations so much as on other less definitive things.

These first three chapters are especially interesting when considered in overview. Paul very carefully approaches the subject, turning the spotlight from Christ, then onto them, then back to Christ. He does this again and again. Each time around, he edges-in closer and closer to their problem, finally calling them out and out “**carnal**” for what they

¹ 1 Cor. 1:10-13 “*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no **divisions** among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared unto me of you...that every one of you says, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?...*”

were doing.² After two whole chapters, he finally point-blanks them between the eyes: Telling them, Their problem was their immature carnality! Four times in three verses! Did they get that? Do we?

Are We Not Yet Carnal?

After so many years, why is it that this tendency, to identify with and align with one particular leader, still has such strong appeal? Entire organizations are formed around this. It is a curious thing, that groups of Christians today, many having been educated in the same fundamental beliefs, many even educated in the same college, are polarized politically, refusing to contact or fellowship with one another, not because of doctrinal differences, but simply and solely on their political affiliation.

What we see in that congregation at Corinth is a less sophisticated version of the phenomenon we see at work in the Church today. Where their congregation seemed threatened only with doctrinal divisions, our modern version of the problem has been refined to a more insidious degree. In their circumstance, the congregation held together, with each among them espousing a ‘favorite’ minister. In our day, we see our congregations dividing into separate exclusive and competing groups, mostly along political lines, with little other basis than the members’ personal preferences of leadership! Yet, outsiders claim to not be able to detect a ‘dimes worth of difference’ doctrinally, between these various splinter groups.

What the Corinthian congregation exhibited was individual or *personal* carnality. Despite their

² 1 Cor. 3:3-4 “*For you are yet **carnal**: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not **carnal**, and walk as men? For while one says, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are you not **carnal**?”*”

identifying with favorites, they continued together as a single viable body. Today, it's different!

Old Wolf, New Clothing

Rather than repent of this, many today have opted to redefine and amplify this human tendency to new levels, to a more indelible degree than ever. The result causes divisions within the congregations, not justified by doctrinal considerations so much as by political considerations. Personal carnality is eclipsed by another form of the same thing, one we could call 'organizational carnality'. The result of that is to create political divisions among people who otherwise believe basically the same things, but who feel compelled by their chosen affiliation to hold a certain degree of contempt for their counterparts in those various 'other' organizations. And most amazingly, these regard themselves as being *the Church of Brotherly Love!*

Few organizations have experienced the negative effects of this phenomenon internally to such degree and in such short time as the Worldwide Church of God. This one organization suffered divisive effects on a massive scale from its self-generated perceptions. Few saw it coming. Few understand the dynamics of how it came to be. Tragically, some still have not come to the point to where they can see the problem and release themselves from its grip.

Those with a long history with the WCG, from the early 1960's at least, witnessed a transformation that other later-comers did not see. Originally, the Church held semi-independent views. These are set forth plainly in the oft mentioned 1939 article written by its founder, Herbert W. Armstrong. It is this writer's personal experience, that into the early 1970's, the Church repudiated the idea that Peter was the chief apostle. This in response to the prevailing religious opinion. No, it was insisted, that if there was a 'chief', it was the apostle John. Later, during the political upheavals of the late 1970's, this opinion became amended, insisting rather, that Peter was indeed the 'Chief Apostle', to whom ultimate Church Authority was given.

It was the dis-fellowshipping of son, Garner Ted, first in 1974, then finally in June of 1978 that gave impetus to this formal change. It wasn't a Biblical

discovery, rather, it was a political expedient. Ironically, it was in interests of maintaining **unity** within the Church that fired this engine of change. It was a fear that Garner Ted, who held substantially identical doctrinal positions, would draw away a following. In fact, those who had a degree of personal admiration for this individual did 'go with' him, forming a parallel organization in direct contrast with and in competition with the main body! Garner Ted's personal charisma and media presence remained potent, establishing what is today, the Church of God International. Despite well-placed false rumors to the contrary, (such as that these people no longer keep God's Holydays), the CGI remained a looming shadow, threatening to draw-away the disaffected from within the WCG of which there were increasingly many. It was feared that Garner Ted might some day eclipse his father, or gain popular support sufficient to regain control of the Church. (A position he effectively enjoyed prior to his final expulsion in 1978.) In fact, it was this fear that led to the selection of the new Pastor General, the father of the present one!

To counter this fearsome possibility, a 'Doctrine' was built, placing an increasing reliance upon the idea that the 'Leader' of the 'parent' organization was God's one-and-only true leading minister. Seeds of this idea were in place already, with the growing opinion that the 'offices' listed in Eph. 4:11 represented a chain of command, thus legitimizing a more 'hierarchal' view of governmental structure within the Church, in contrast with its earlier view. Next, it became the official position among the ministry that there was but **ONE** Chief Apostle at any point in history. **"God always works thru just one man,"** it was alleged! Soon after, the 'office' of Prophet was declared vacant, neatly removing any chance of there being any close competitors in office to challenge the authority of or to compete for the position of 'God's One True Apostle' on Earth.

The capstone of this changeover was a formally declared position by the Apostle in the early '80's, that **"The one thing the Catholic Church had right was 'Government'!"** This effectively endorsed that political structure upon which it was organized, imitating the pattern of that ancient political state, (Rome) which Scripture refers to

as “The Beast”! “**God’s Government**” thereafter became a prime Doctrine of the Church. The Pastor General became “God’s Apostle”, even “God’s Anointed”! If anyone had qualms about this, or suggested any ‘qualification’, they dared not let on! It had, by the early ‘80’s, become an absolute.

So we saw a most amazing thing. A deliberate and even a calculated change of teaching within the Church, intended to preserve it and its mission, effectively causing it to take into its bosom, a fire that precipitated its eventual demise, in a rather predictable way. The end came quickly. It emanated from within! Turns out, we met our enemy, and the enemy was US!

That Herbert Armstrong was a **minister** of God, **used** as few others in history had been, was a case many could have made, and still do make, now, nearly a generation later. Few had such an excellent understanding of essential Biblical Truths, coupled with a talent for publishing these Truths in an attention-getting way.

It was our introduction of a non-Biblical concept that eventually corrupted those very processes it was intended to preserve. Government became a passion in the 1980’s. Not government as taught in the Bible, not as once conceived, but Government of and by a Sole Leader, the rule over the Church by just one man. We alleged that this was the situation always, citing Peter as being the Chief Apostle in the early Church, as precedent for believing so. Not only did this revise the doctrinal position, but it also exhibited itself in its legal configuration, with the Pastor General becoming “**A Corporation Sole**”, meaning all income and assets of the Church became the personal property of the Pastor General. This, at least, was **new**! (Peter and any perceived successors didn’t do anything like this.) This became acutely problematic when the Pastor General divorced in 1980, without due explanation, and when his ex-wife attempted to sue for 50 percent of the Church’s substantial financial assets. Members were largely unaware of this. It later meant that his personally appointed successor inherited all these same assets in full. The membership owned none of what their contributions bought. Millions of dollars in property and in excess of \$100 millions in annual

donations became the sole property of the new Pastor General as well! Effectively, fiscally at least, HE was the Church! (But we were **taught** that the Church was really its members!) But, so long as “God’s Apostle” remained in good form, this seemed to be a good situation. It was the succession experience that soon proved disastrous.

Just six months before his death, the Pastor General sent clear instructions to all the membership, by means of a “Special Edition” of the *Worldwide News*, that “in the event of his death, the Advisory Council of Elders would appoint one from among themselves to become the new Pastor General.”

However, this was **not** how it was ultimately done. Another component of one-man rule factored-in. You see, in any good one-man organization, you can’t have a true and legitimate Council of Elders. Any “Council” in a one-man organization must be composed of ‘yes men’. If they are not ‘yes men’, there is a distinct chance they will agree among themselves and over-rule their Pastor General. Rod Meredith can attest to this. This is a situation closely monitored by the one-man in charge. The Council can’t be allowed to think for themselves for a minute! If they are being truly led by God’s Spirit, then it’s certain they will do so, should any untoward situation be put before them. Ample evidence exists in just this one succession situation alone. The WCG Council of January, 1986 would not have selected the person for Pastor General that was imposed, nor did they challenge the unconsulted ‘appointment’, which selection, according to the special notice sent out to all the members in June of 1985, should have been theirs to make. That instruction was never rescinded. Their non-response to this pre-emption of their clear responsibility confirms their ineffectiveness. Yet, some would say, “This is the Government of God”!

So, Who Knew?

Now that the new Pastor General is seen for what he really was, we can now face the questions that we couldn’t and wouldn’t have allowed ourselves to think originally. Leaving aside the various political considerations that led to that gross mal-appointment, we need to face some obvious questions. A man was appointed Pastor General of the

Church who **did not believe** the Truths it taught. Who knew? Did the one making the appointment know? We want to say he didn't! Did the new appointee know? He had to have known!

Where Did God Stand on This?

The unsettling thing is to ask, "Did God know?" We know that He had to have known! Then, if that is the case, where was God's Spirit in the selection process? God's Spirit does not inspire error. God always knows who is His and who is not His! God had to know that this new Pastor General did not hold the same values and beliefs as his predecessor. God had to know what the ultimate outcome of this mal-appointment would be. If He had inspired a majority to see the truth about this appointment, how would we have reacted? We would have been put in a position of acting contrary to our pointedly affirmed belief structure: that 'doctrine' where we insisted that the Church leadership was "the Government of God"! If we did react in interest of the Truth, we'd have caused a political crisis second to none in our recent history. Our self-generated error came back around and bit us. We were forced to reject the original institution. Is this what God wanted us to do? After all, it's what we did!

Truth Doesn't Court Disaster

Most of us, including those of us with personal doubts, subordinated those doubts, thinking we must be in the wrong. After all, God wouldn't allow the wrong person to ascend to the 'chief seat', we thought. Not in His Church! We allowed our Spiritual senses to become dulled, failing to see, and failing to say when we did see. All in respect of a faulty doctrinal premise brought on by our personal carnality (personal favoritisms) amplified by institutional carnality: the promotion of one man over all others; thinking more highly of a human leader than we ought to have. We failed to remain alert to the 'roaring lion'. We gave him the tool to use against us. Spiritual casualties eventually became strewn everywhere. It never should've been. It was OUR fault! WE failed God's test.

So, though knowing the Truth, nevertheless we subordinated our perceptions to another authority, an un-Biblical idea, ultimately allowing Truth to become subverted in obscene ways. Nearly every

fundamental doctrine we were privileged to know became diluted, polluted or repudiated. As illustrated in those four separate afflictions that came upon the Pastor General in the summer of 1996, the Church passed through similar afflictions.³ Having the 'GALL' to repudiate Biblical Truth, the Church then suffered doctrinal 'digestive' problems. That in succession was followed by the inevitable 'structural breakdown', ultimately ending with massive spiritual dysfunction. Few, it seems, even noticed the parallels. Fewer heeded.

The process which ultimately brought the Worldwide Church of God to insignificance was an age old phenomenon, the product of basic human carnality. We took that fault and refined it further, to an organizational level, blinding ourselves to what we were doing and to what could happen. The obvious thus became obscenely 'unthinkable'. It worked its process upon us never-the-less! What is even more incredible is the fact that some never learned the lesson. We have among our spin-off organizations, those who still cling to the fundamental error. They haven't repented of it. They face having to experience the lesson once again.

The Source of the Problem

Having now a prime example of the ultimate consequence of identifying with and elevating one man over all others: division, discord among brethren, (which God says He hates,)⁴ and doctrinal schisms, shouldn't we take closer interest in the scriptural passage which addresses this condition?

Paul was especially concerned with the spiritual condition of an otherwise exemplary congregation. In 1st Corinthians, the first three chapters, he begins with a salutation, commending their grace and enrichment in utterance and all knowledge, being confirmed blameless until the coming of Christ. (1:1-9) He then alludes to a problem, that of the importance 'of all speaking the same thing.' (1:10) Because it was reported to him that there was contention among them due to a tendency often found among the more spiritually developed, he said,

³ See my letters regarding the **four** separate life-threatening afflictions suffered by the PG in mid 1996. This writer had unique sources to be aware of these many developing events.

⁴ Proverbs 6:19

“Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided?... (1:12)

Paul then went on to minimize his own role or that of the others,⁵ focusing their thinking on the vital efficacy of the **cross**, not any individual leader. He then amplifies the importance of that event over the mere instrument that might have been used to bring them into acquaintance with it. ***“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.”*** (v 26-29) He then goes on to minimize his own accomplishment in order to draw their focus back to Christ. ***“...as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the LORD’.”*** (v.31) ***“...that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God”*** (2:5) (NKJ thruout)

It’s interesting to notice the downward progression in the terms Paul chooses. In verse 27, ***“...God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.”*** He goes from foolish to weak to base to despised to non-apparent: a big arrow pointing downward. His point being, that God’s Plan and God’s Call are not built on highly developed intellectual sophistication or esteemed philosophers of the age, such as Socrates, Plato or Philo. God’s Church isn’t to be set up using the world’s philosophical structure. The Truth isn’t of human origin, and we shouldn’t credit the messengers or servants of that Truth with being its ultimate source.

⁵ Had anyone back then remotely thought that Peter was the Chief Apostle, Paul missed a golden opportunity to here state the fact. Paul didn’t even use his supposed official title “Peter”! Cephas here in verse 12 (and in 3:22) was Peter!

The focus and credit must remain with God alone, or else we risk political divisions detrimental to the integrity and commission of His Church.

A Force Which Divides

Paul recognized that danger. Their glorying, by personally identifying with the men of reputation would ultimately cause division. If not doctrinally, for certain politically. Paul deliberately minimized the roles of the ministers. ***“However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.”*** (2:6) As they gained maturity, they encountered a predictable danger, of looking to men and the wisdom that seemed to emanate through men through their presentation, overlooking the obvious, that, ***“...God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.”*** (2:10)

Whatever things any of us knows, it is to the credit of God and His Spirit. Paul re-focuses them onto this essential fact. One they well knew originally, before they ‘gained’ understanding. ***“...Even so, no one knows the things of God except (by) the Spirit of God. Now, we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God... then quoting Isaiah 40:13 “...’Who has known the mind of the LORD that He may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”*** (v.16) That Mind is **in** us! It was put there by means of our receiving God’s Spirit. Those who serve us and the Church are not who we should look to as ultimate authorities. Their service is to organize and focus our collective efforts, not to be our ultimate spiritual base.

Individually, WE are the Temple of that Spirit.⁶ The Church is not! The Church is the organism that provides the environment for each of us to develop through its congregational ministry and allowing God to amplify our collective evangelization efforts. How does God work through a Church that is bent on fracturing itself by its exclusive political polarities. (We learned to be this way from our experience in the WCG that built on

⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 & 6:19

a basic human characteristic, honing it to such a sharp focus that we are now even exclusive with one another.)

This established in their minds, he then addresses his real concerns in Chapter 3, lamenting the fact that they were still too immature in some areas. In verse 1, ***“I...could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. ... for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal, and behaving like mere men? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos’, are you not carnal?”*** He minimizes again the role those various ministers they were exposed to had played, instead, focusing on all things being God’s ultimate doing. ***“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but (mere) ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. ... For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. ... I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. (3:5-10)***

The ultimate test of the structure that anyone builds upon it is the buildings’ staying power. Fire of one sort or another will ultimately test each one’s substance. ***“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him.”*** (16-17)

When we set in our minds that God’s Servants are God’s ultimate authorities on Earth, not looking through them to God, we can risk losing our true bearings. When we settle on just one minister as being God’s ‘exclusive’ and ultimate Authority, we are forced into a narrower fellowship environment, and are at least subliminally coerced to hold a degree of contempt for others who have God’s Spirit. We are denied the intellectual exercise of addressing the challenges that come with being exposed to a wider field of growth. Within a smaller, more exclusive ministry, we can avoid having to face certain uncomfortable questions. This is convenient, but it leaves the body unhealthy, as we learned when the new WCG Administration began exchanging doctrines, at first gradually, then later on a massive scale. We were not equipped to deal

with the challenges. Many opted out of the race!

What set us up for this was that the Church after the mid-‘70’s had defiled itself with a contaminant, one even here in 1st Corinthians being described as ‘**carnality**’. It suffered a fiery loss as a result. God allowed a situation that forced everyone to thoughtfully reconsider this important area. The institution itself imploded, though some members survived. Many weren’t spiritually prepared to deal with the possibility that our ministry could utter things that weren’t absolutely true. We regarded any Leader as representing God’s Government after all!

God never intended that we regard any of His true ministers as being ‘super-elevated’. Even though these were God’s True ministers: Paul, Apollos, Peter: there was no question as to their credentials or their legitimacy. The problem was with what members were doing in holding an inappropriate regard for these true servants.

The modern Church did a similar thing, but honed to a more insidious degree. We succumbed to institutional carnality and paid a dear price. We were bequeathed an organization that lacked structural integrity. It couldn’t long stand on its own. That condition accounts to our concept of Government.

“Government” is how we ‘gloried’ in our Church and our ministry. Members came to rely on being told what the Truth was. They didn’t **also** prove it for themselves. When the next ‘leading minister’ told them that the truth was something else, many felt they’d been had by the previous administration. Truth collapsed, yet “Government” stood firm! A whole new ‘paradigm’ came to bear through it! Those many changes could not have been imposed without it. Have we learned the important lesson?

The ‘bottom line’ is and always was, as Paul so well states: ***“Therefore let no one glory in men, For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life or death, or things present or things to come – all are yours. And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”*** (1Cor.3:22-23)

Personality elevation and organizational exclusivism (‘glorying’ (a form of pride)) will always pose an ever present danger to one’s spiritual health. **Ω**