

“HOW GREAT WE ARE”

“Pride that dines on vanity sups on contempt.”

~Benjamin Franklin

It is true. Pride and vanity leads to contempt toward others. Pride and vanity are like leaven. When church leadership lacks humility, the vanity spreads and becomes a divisive stumbling block to peace and harmony among God’s scattered people. It FOSTERS A HIGH-MINDED LEADERSHIP AND CONTEMPT TOWARDS THOSE CONSIDERED SOMEHOW INFERIOR. It thus promotes division and hinders growth in the church and in the individual.

Many “pay and pray,” but are they able to grow in humility? Does it help or hinder true humility to be constantly puffed up and told all the reasons why you are superior to your brothers and sisters in other church organizations? Does it promote the spiritual growth in the individual that true Godly humility and self-examination will do, to repeatedly be told by your church leaders why yours is the “best” church with the “best” ministry, in a condescending way towards your brothers and sisters “outside” your church organization? Are such statements and the attitudes behind them attractive – or repulsive? Does such arrogance bring unity, growth and strength to God’s people, or do these statements and attitudes foster division, strife, self-glorifying vanity, and condescension – all of which are of a worldly devilish wisdom (Jm.3:13-16)?

My dear friends and family in Christ, it is with faithful care and loving concern that I have decided to write about these important topics. Perhaps some of us have become a bit overconfident, as Israel did after the fall of Jericho. **Perhaps many of us have grown complacent, and too self-assured in our stand with God!** “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12).

Some leaders claim that “We’re the best church” -or- “We’re the “MAIN” place God is working” -or- “We are more perfectly practicing the correct ‘government of God’” -or- “We’re preaching the Gospel more perfectly and zealously than any other branch of the Church of God” -or- “We’re best preparing the bride” -or- “We have more of the most experienced ministers” -or- “Our publications or programs are the best.” And, “I’m the best church leader because I was with Mr. Armstrong more than most so I’m the most qualified.” Everyone should want to join with us, because **“WE are the ONES”**... the ones who are **the FOREFRONT** of God’s efforts on this earth today! **Oh, “we’re not perfect” – we’ll admit – “we’re just the best there is today...”**

In a similar way, Jesus warned the disciples to beware of the LEAVEN of the religious leaders of their day who had become so “puffed up” that they had to have all the important titles, the “chief seats” and to be called “Rabbi” or great teacher (Matt.23:6-12 & Luke 12:1). Jesus said, “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt 23:11-12). Naturally, this leavening has spread among the brethren. It has been the cause of much unnecessary division among God’s people, even dividing families! Such beliefs have also caused many to overlook abuses of power. How could the “best church” with the “best ministers” do something if it was wrong? It is a shame that so many have allowed this to happen through silence and acquiescence. How sad it is to see ministers who ought to know better, do nothing. How disheartening it is to see when some lack the intestinal fortitude or back-bone to stand up for God’s Truth and protect God’s people, when they are needed the most (Ezek.34:1-10)!

Various church leaders claim a preeminent position simply because they say they have spent so many hours with Mr. Armstrong, or because they claim to be his true successor! **But aren’t the fruits of our lives more important than whom we have spent time with? After all, didn’t Judas Iscariot spend more time with Christ than Paul did? Did that make Judas a better minister than Paul?** Such self-aggrandizing statements are ridiculous, and shallow! Aren’t we all to be seeking to follow Christ, NOT a man?

Have we set up our own idols? Why the need for preeminence? Where does Godly humility fit in? Some claim to be building upon Mr. Armstrong’s foundation. Respectfully, there is “no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor.:3:11). All other statements are misguided and sound idolatrous.

Many groups boast a quality or reason why they are the “best.” Some have claimed that “all the others are Laodiceans,” at best. Are condescending comparisons Godly, wise or humble? Can ANY OF US in ANY fellowship of God’s Church REALLY afford to make such self-aggrandizing statements that are clearly disdainful to our brethren in other fellowships of the Church of God? Isn’t it especially so given our recent church history that has been such a despicable display of conduct of character assassination and counterattack between leading ministers and their respective church groups – which in turn has spread like leavening to the brethren? Can any of us wisely claim to be better than anyone else? Can we not learn to joyfully proclaim the Truth in a positive manner by expounding God’s Word to the world, and by feeding God’s sheep, while setting them an example of living in peace with our brethren? For God’s glory, and in obedience to His precepts on humility, can we learn to take the focus OFF of ourselves?

Like many, I have put my heart into the support of those who were supposed to preach the Gospel (the Good News), and lovingly feed God’s flock. It’s sad to accept, but some have noticed that many people have been changing from the HUMBLE and “Hungry-for-Truth” people we used to be, to become increasingly condescending and judgmental of others,

while vaunting ourselves. We're often quick to judge others – especially if they are in another fellowship of God's Church. We're often quick to judge those in the world as well. Sometimes **we're quick to judge and label each world event in a tone that gives the impression that we think we are speaking on behalf of God Himself.** But things don't always go as we thought they would, and we end up hoping our words are confirmed (Ezek.13:6).

We need to be careful that we do not arrogate responsibilities to ourselves. God gave His Church a commission to preach the GOSPEL. Gospel literally means GOOD NEWS. While continuing to expound the prophecies that warn us all to repent or suffer the coming punishments, perhaps we ought to try to include in our focus a lot more on the loving POSITIVE HOPE and ENCOURAGING COMFORT in God's Word! God's Word is beautifully encouraging – painting pictures of hope, healing, happiness, love and eternal life!

Certainly God's Word is corrective and has warnings, given in love. These things must also be taught. Prophetic warnings are an aspect of the Gospel, but the Gospel is also full of HOPE, ENCOURAGING COMFORT, and how God's **law of love will be written upon men's hearts!** Perhaps the balance of our focus needs to be addressed, which could help us be more accurate, and more likely to be attractive to others?

A Laodicean attitude is boastful and **self-confident** – lacking in humility. People with such an attitude think they see things clearly, but they are BLINDED about themselves, and need repentance (Rev.3:17-19). Does this apply to us? Are we part of an organization that maligns and is condescending to other fellowships of God's Church? Satan is the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10).

In early 1993, the Global Church of God published a refreshing booklet on the subject of church governance, encouraging a collegial approach to leadership. It was entitled Church Government and Church Unity. That booklet was an **inspiring example of humility. Why are so many now engaging in judgmental comparative statements?** The implications of the many condescending statements that many congregations hear routinely – including in various sermons and other forms of media, strike many people as being presumptuous and self-righteous. They are offensive to many.

Come my brethren and fellow leaders among God's flock, let us reason together. When we **vaunt ourselves** (1 Cor.13:4) by making statements that God is using us as the main "thrust" of His Work, or by claiming to be the "main leader" or the "main ones," or the "the only *viable* work," do these types of statements not also seem to limit God and make Him look weak? It strikes me as being blasphemous! Really – if the tiny work of preaching the Gospel by any and all of the COG's today is the best God could do in His efforts to warn His people Israel and the whole world – then God's strength would be small indeed! How can any of us be both humble and still act so presumptuous as to describe ourselves as the "best" or the "only viable work" of God? *Not by might nor by power but by My*

Spirit, says the LORD of Hosts” (Zech.4:6).

Please dear reader, don't perceive this as an attack against anyone, but as a PLEADING – for ALL OF US TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR – EACH OF US (including the author of this book), and be HUMBLE as we beseech God to restore to us a true spirit of humility, love and respect for each of our other scattered brethren, in hopes that we can see peace, joy and the protection of God's favorable presence fully restored to us all. **Vaunting and focusing upon oneself, leads to division** (1 Cor.3:3-5).

Perhaps God's ability to work through us is limited by our lack of humility? God did not heal Paul lest he be puffed up (2 Cor.12:9). Perhaps God has not blessed us with certain gifts because we lack the humility to handle them! Can we acknowledge that God may also be working with other of His people or in other ways that we may not recognize? Such was the case with Elijah! God had 7,000 other faithful people that Elijah didn't know about or acknowledge (1 Ki.19:18). For example, consider God's Spirit moving and preparing many people for a great repentance in His time, which could even be independent of anything we are doing! Remember, no man can come to Christ unless the Father calls them (John 6:44)! So God is in the forefront – not His Church! Each time when God's still small voice calls someone, could it be God preparing many thousands of others to repent and come to Him in various ways that we cannot now see, since we cannot see into the hearts of men? There are many Bibles in the land – not just ours. Each one contains the Gospel of the Kingdom of God! Even Mr. Armstrong was surprised at finding new little groups that were keeping God's commands, Holy Days, Sabbaths, and were accepting Christ as the Messiah – and he often considered them to be part of God's Church.

We all know there are differences between many of the various fellowships of God's Church. Each person needs to prayerfully explore and investigate where they can best grow and serve God. So do it! **But do we all have to be “better” or more “viable” than each other?** Perhaps the “need” to proclaim ourselves to be the “MAIN” ones, is really to feel better about ourselves? To some, it has been perceived as an attempt to keep a power base or tithe income.

Perhaps the most “viable work” and the One in the forefront is Christ? Perhaps Christ is the MAIN ONE preparing His bride, and preaching the Good News! Perhaps some of the most “important” ministers are those unknown “local” elders who most love God, who most love God's people, and who most closely and humbly teach and follow God's doctrine directly from His Written Word!

If we really are the best, let's wait and let God tell us if it is so. Let's not **impute** to God. Is it wise or humble to take to ourselves that “chief seat” among God's elect? How did Jesus say to handle matters of status or position in the church and in the world?

8 *“When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him;*

9 and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.

10 But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'friend go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. 11 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lk.14:8-11)

That's pretty clear! So wouldn't it be better to simply preach powerfully the full TRUTH IN HUMILITY, serve (ALL in) God's flock, and let God appoint and title us? Furthermore, do all the condescending words of comparison and "competition" attract our scattered brethren at home or in the various scattered churches of God to come to fellowship and learn with us? Or do those types of condescending statements repel people? The facts is, THOSE TERMS REPEL MANY, and appear arrogant, judgmental and self-righteous, as they SET US UP (exalt us) and PUT OTHERS DOWN.

This is one more way Satan has limited growth in the body of Christ, and limited the preaching of the Gospel. Through this lack of true humility, we have not pleased or honored God as we could have. The leavening has spread, and we have unnecessarily weakened ourselves and our effectiveness in the Gospel, and have violated God's loving laws and precepts, through this form of arrogance.

None of us want to repel our scattered brethren. Most of us deeply desire to help as many of our scattered brethren as possible. Let's humbly learn to show more patience, love, and respect for all of God's people.

On page 32 of the 1993 Global Church of God, Church Government and Church Unity booklet, it was stated: *Down through history, Christ has guided His Church so that often – in fact most of the time – there were different "branches" of the true Church co-existing at the same time. Sometimes it was a geographical necessity. But often, as in the Sardis Era, Christ allowed His people a certain freedom of choice. Which Seventh Day Church of God would they worship with?*

Since we believe Mr. Armstrong came from a Church of God branch, then he was one of many people in his day. So it is for each of us today. If Mr. HWA's fellowship in those early days was the ONLY place where God's people were located, then how did his wife Loma learn about the Sabbath, even before he did?

Jesus said "He who is not against us, is on our part" (Mk.9:38-40). Jesus had others who were also on their part. They were not to "compete" or set themselves up over each other. Jesus also told the disciples that He had "other sheep who were not of this fold" (Jn.10:16). We may not always be aware as to where all of God's other people are, or what God is also doing through them in any given location or era of time. "By their fruits, you shall know them," not by their puffed up proclamations of self importance (Mt.7:20 & Mt.23:12).

Christ's words; the 1993 booklet "Church Government and Church Unity," and what Mr. Armstrong said in his autobiography and elsewhere, have all demonstrated that the church has previously recognized a freedom of choice in fellowship that Christ has granted. WHY then would we want to make belittling statements about God's other sheep in other folds? Would you engage in putting down your sibling brothers and sisters?

How did God inspire Paul to put it? "*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves*" (Phil.2:3). **I would rather be the sinner beating on his chest in humility, than the judgmental Pharisee looking down on others he considered less righteous than himself** (Lk.18:9-14). Surely we all feel the same way. LET'S BEGIN TO SHOW IT – TO LIVE IT!

In dealing with a division among God's people, Paul noted that some were saying they were "of Paul." Paul was their leader. He was mighty in pen. Others favored Apollos who was mighty in word. Others preferred Peter. Therefore Paul said:

1 Cor 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? 4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? 5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? 6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither is he that plants any thing, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase.

THERE IT IS! GOD'S WORD SAYS A FOCUS UPON THE TEACHER, RATHER THAN ON CHRIST AND HIS MESSAGE, IS CARNAL AND DIVISIVE! Paul was humble. He said he was nothing! He said Peter was nothing! He said Apollos was nothing! He said Christ **IS** something! I implore us all to consider Paul's words. How is it any different if today people say, "I am of Mr. _____", or "I am of Mr. _____, the successor of Mr. HWA," or "I am of _____ church", or "I am of _____ fellowship?" Others say, they believe what Ellen G. White said. Others exclaim "The Pope is chief, follow him." (Hopefully no one will ever say they are a follower of this author.) Let's do say that we are a follower of Jesus Christ, the true and ONLY head of the Church of God! Let's do say we're a part of God's Church!

If our focus is centered upon ourselves, or upon which physical leader or fellowship we support or "follow" – instead of leading by an example of preaching the Gospel and showing love and respect for one another – we actually **perpetuate the division**! Some may feel they attend where there is a more sound Biblical doctrine being taught and where there's more zeal to preach the Gospel. That's good! **Is love and humility there too?** Let us expound God's word with zeal and passion, while **showing love and respect for one another. Only then will we be recognized as Christ's disciples** (Jn.13:35).

Let's say only "I am of Christ," and NOT put ANY emphasis upon ourselves – especially not in any kind of a comparative way. Paul warned that in the end time, people would rise up from within the Church seeking to draw disciples after THEMSELVES, to place them under their human regimes. But to protect them and keep them in the right way, Paul commended them not to men, or to any one church leader, but to the "**WORD OF GOD**" (Acts.20:28-32). God's Word teaches that we definitely need leadership in His Church – but as servants, not masters. And as Ben Franklin said so poetically, pride leads to contempt toward others. It destroyed Satan. Let's not let it destroy us!