

Unity and Division

Sermon by Mr. Eric Keefer

Good afternoon to you all across the region. We have a little bit of a change in format here this afternoon. We were supposed to have been in Roseburg this Sabbath, but because of the snow that occurred especially down south in the Cottage Grove area, it prevented us from being able to travel down yesterday. And we had quite a bit of snow and ice last night here in the Salem area so we ended up cancelling services here in Salem as well, so we are broadcasting from our home. We've got a house full of folks with us here as well as people connected throughout the region.

I do know that Boise had to cancel their services as well because of snow in the area so we're dealing with a number of congregations because of the weather--unusual weather that we're dealing with had to cancel services, so it's nice to be able to be backed up on Ventrilo for all of you.

We do have just a few announcements that I'd like to give to you this afternoon. First of all, in from Boise, Mr. Bill Eastburn is asking our prayers on his behalf. He's been suffering from terrible sciatic pain on his left side radiating down to his left leg and then causing pain in the calf. He has sort of a carbon copy of that pain on the right side but much milder. But he's in a lot of pain and it's something that has happened to him in the past that just essentially went away over time. But he is dealing with that now and trying to find relief, and so your prayers for him would be appreciated.

Also Mrs. Dee Wagnier of our Salem congregation is requesting prayers for God's intervention. She's been diagnosed with I guess what's called travelling arthritis, or migrating arthritis. She's got some medication which helped reduce the pain, but she's requesting God's intervention and help in healing, particularly that there'd be no side effects of the medications or anything that would further complicate that situation.

We do have a number of other prayer requests on the website, and updates, so please be sure to check that. That's important.

I also have an announcement that's being made across all the congregations in the church, a very unpleasant announcement, but nonetheless one that needs to be made. This is an announcement that went to the Pasadena and Orange County congregations earlier in the week from Mr. Hulme. It reads:

"It is with much regret that I write to let you know that Mr. Peter Nathan has resigned from employment of the church. We had a conversation on Monday, December 2nd, at which Mr. John Anderson was present. It appears that Mr. Nathan has developed differing views on government in the church. I pointed out to him that his views are incompatible with the church's teaching, and it became clear that he could not continue in his role as church pastor.

While I had hoped that he would change his views, he chose rather to resign. Reluctantly therefore I accepted his resignation. Peter and I have shared many encouraging times in our working lives and I wish him well for the future.

Mr. Jerry de Gier will now assume pastorship of the Pasadena/Orange County congregations.

As we go forward it would be helpful to remember two passages from the writing of the apostle Paul. The first one is from I Corinthians chapter 1, verse 10, where Paul says: "Now I plead with 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."

Also he quotes Ephesians chapter 4, verses 1 through 3:

"I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

And he concludes: "With love and respect, David Hulme."

So an unpleasant announcement that perhaps it's also—we'll cover a little bit in the sermon this afternoon as well.

We did decide not to have a sermonette this Sabbath because I want to spend some extra time with you regarding this recent subject. We, of course, were on vacation when this sort of thing began to occur in the church, and we'd been in contact with the elders to see how things were going and such. But nonetheless it is a time that presents us with a lot of difficulties and a lot of (no sound) in the sermon to address this topic, hopefully to provide some clarity.

During the course of the last several weeks now, the peace that we've enjoyed for over the last fifteen years has been threatened. It's the threat of dissension and division within the church whose very signpost as God's people is to be the love and the unity that we are to have. And it is something that we all need to take very seriously and consider very carefully.

As the body of Christ, we need to ask for God's healing and for His steady hand of comfort and strength and guidance and calmness on the church as well. It is particularly upsetting, I suppose, and confusing for all of us when men—when leaders of whom we have respected and have been taught truth, take actions that appear to be out of character.

This afternoon I want to address with you as your pastor some things that I believe are important for all of us to consider, and attempt to add some clarity to the recent events that we've experienced.

I personally believe that openness is essential and critical at these times, and I intend to be as open with the facts with you as I can without disparaging anyone. It's not my intent. In fact, it's expressly not my intent to disparage anyone. I'm not interested in names attached to things, but I am interested in ideas. If after this sermon you continue to have questions, please let me know and I promise I will be as open as I possibly can and discuss anything—any questions that you might have. I think it's very important that we have open dialogue about this sort of thing if somebody indeed has questions.

The current situation, as you are well aware of by now, and the threat of our unity, climaxed in a letter that was written by Mr. Andrews to Mr. Hulme and the church board. This letter, which I have a copy, was frankly highly critical of Mr.

Hulme's leadership. While the tone of the letter was not kind, expression of disagreement, in and of itself—let's be clear—that expression of disagreement in and of itself is not necessarily wrong. But what made this an issue for the entire church was the sending of the letter to various members of the church with an expressed permission to send it to anyone they wished. That's clearly promoting one's ideas and causing division. And that is the aspect of what was wrong.

Some of you received it, while others did not. And as I understand it, when Mr. Hulme spoke nationwide that many of you had not even received the Member Letter at that time, nor were you aware of what had transpired.

I do believe, however, that since this letter has been made public to some, that it's important that all of you know the basic contentions of that letter so that you don't have to wonder and be tempted to speculate about what the issues are and what they are not. Now the letter itself is obviously written under emotional duress. Now it's written with a lot of emotion and, in my opinion, is very cutting and accusatory in a corrective tone. So I'm not going to read that letter to you because of that. I don't think it's fair to the people involved to read that sort of thing to you. But I do want to lay out the basic contentions of the letter.

What is the issue? What are the issues? I think that's important for us to consider. I think it's important for us to set names aside and look very calmly at what are the issues. Why has this become an issue? What is being laid out?

So it is my intention this afternoon to do my best to remove the basic tone of the letter, again written in emotional duress, and emotion, and we all have those things from time to time; but to try to present to you in as clear terms as I can the basic contention.

When anyone attempts to put someone's words into other words, there's always the danger of misrepresentation, or misinterpreting. And while I will do my absolute best, and I believe I'm giving it my best shot at being, you know, totally—trying to get to the issues—nonetheless you have to be aware that I'm human, and it's possible that I could unintentionally misrepresent something. So I think that should be said in the outset.

Now, the letter itself is a long letter, and we must be content with a summarized version. So what I want to do is lay out this letter for you, and again in the best way that I can, trying to separate the person from the letter. All that we're interested in are the ideas. Whether we want to look at these ideas, we want to look at what's laid out for us, and to evaluate, to weigh that without, hopefully as best we can, thinking about the people that are involved.

So I want to give you some of the things to consider after laying out the letter for you as God's people, and some things that I think that we should think about as we evaluate what is in this particular letter. So it might be helpful, and I'll try to lay this out for you, because what I'd like to do is lay out this letter in sections, and it might be helpful for you to just—if you're taking notes, to note these sections because I'll be coming back to these sections as we try to weigh this letter together.

Again, we're not weighing any person; we're not disparaging any person. We're simply looking as clearly as we can, as calmly as we can, at the things that are contended in the letter.

The first major point is: the letter begins with a statement that the support that is provided for Mr. Hulme has always been contingent upon Mr. Hulme's efforts to preach the gospel.

And then the letter is really broken down into two main sections. It's issues of government and it's issues of preaching the gospel.

So within that large category of government in the church, let me lay out a little bit further what is alleged. In some ways, there is no way to get around a little bit of names in this sort of thing, so I need to do that as well. In the letter it says that Mr. Hulme's teachings and understanding of government is the issue. He is defined as what is called here an autocratic ruler. And we'll look at some of that a little bit later.

The second aspect under government is that the letter lays out that biblically based government is something that leaders in the church don't seem to

understand. And here's a pattern that is laid out that apparently takes place within these sorts of leaders.

“Those in authority come to believe that they're qualified to rule, but when they fail in those leadership roles, they selectively misuse scriptures to excuse failings, and then they misuse scriptures to justify their acquisition, possession and retention of that authority.”

The next major section is a section on the history of mankind's governance failures. And it lays out a problem with human government as laid out for us in the Bible, and the inability of mankind to govern himself.

It talks about Adam and Eve and that failure. It talks about the pre-flood era and that failure. It talks about the post-flood, and then as a sort of offset it mentions the nation of Israel and the fact that they were given God's laws and yet they themselves failed as well. So there is a laying out of the time after time after time failure of mankind to govern.

But then it states that Jesus, when he came to this earth, gave the church a new model for governing, and that model is based upon Luke chapter 22, verses 24 to 30—we won't turn there now—we'll turn there later—where Jesus talks about the disciples shall not lord over others but shall serve. The role of governing, of leading, would be one of service. And the letter says that we must learn this model of service or we will never rule in the kingdom, which is what Jesus says in this section. And this will be the model for eternity.

The next section then says that there are no examples in the New Testament of individuals who have exercised what's called autocratic authority. The case that's presented—one of the cases that's presented is the case in the book of Philemon. Now you probably remember what's going on in the book of Philemon but let me just lay it out.

Philemon owns this slave by the name of Onesimus. And Onesimus has escaped his master and fled to Paul, and Paul is writing the letter of Philemon to essentially encourage Philemon to set Onesimus free and let Onesimus serve Paul in his needs.

So the letter contends that in the case of this situation would be where we might expect a person in authority to exercise autocratic authority. But Paul never, according to the letter, even references his apostolic authority. Paul simply appeals to Philemon as a brother.

Another example is given about the situation of incest in the Corinthian church. And you'll recall this. A man is apparently having an affair of sorts with his father's wife, probably his step-mother. And the letter contends that this is as close as we see Paul coming to exercising that kind of authority. But he says in this case, when Paul exercises authority to tell this man to be put outside the church, Paul is angry with the congregation because he's had to exercise that authority, as if he did not want to exercise that authority but the congregation has made him do so.

The next major section then shows us what is contended as a model for authority within the church, which is a family structure set out in Ephesians chapter 5. It says that, according to this model, of course, the Father is primarily and ultimately in authority over everything; secondly, that Jesus is in submission to the Father, and the letter says that Ephesians 5:1 tells us to imitate Jesus' submission to the Father. And then it says Christ, of course, is the head of the church, and it talks about this section of Ephesians 5: 22 through 33, which shows a parallel of authority structure in the family and the church. In other words, there is the structure of the family, and that structure of the family should also be the way it is in the church. Husbands are to be the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church. Ephesians 5:24 makes plain that the church is subject to Christ and the letter specifically says to Christ, not any man, not even Paul himself.

Secondly: husbands are to love and serve their wives just as Christ loved and served the church. And then it points out that Ephesians 5: 21, then, explains the manner for which it is to operate within the church itself. That is, the church is supposed to exercise mutual submission one to another. That's how authority within the church is to be exercised. So we have the Father is over all, we have Christ, who is the head of the church, and then we have the church submitting to

Christ, but within the church Ephesians 5:21 tells us that we should have mutual submission one to another.

The next major section lays out that the church itself, as a corporation, is governed by California law, and California law requires that ultimate authority reside with a board of directors, not an individual. Therefore the board, according to California law, and the corporation, is the highest authority for a non-profit organization; and since the Bible requires us to respect the laws of the land, except where it might be contradicted with God's laws, then the church should operate in this manner since the letter contends there is no contradiction.

Considering the family model then, and the corporate model, the conclusion is drawn that authority rests with Christ within the church, who is under the Father's authority; and that the Father demands us within the church to practice what's called mutual submission, not autocratic rule.

The letter then goes on to give some examples about Paul. Paul was no autocratic ruler. Example is given of Paul in a situation where Paul does not take tithes. It's stated that Paul makes tents as a source of income, and that he had the authority to take tithes, which it says in a couple of places, but he restrained himself and imposed self-limits on his own power. He had the authority to take tithes, but he chose not to do it, and in this way he submitted himself to the beloved children of the Most High to serve them.

The next and final contention under this major section is that the misuse of authority in the church is perhaps the major cause of fracturing the Church of God in our modern era.

Now, the letter goes on to talk about a couple of examples of some adverse effects of government within the church, and I'm not going to go into those examples, but the examples are related to the clarifications that have been given about the blessing of little children.

And then finally the second major aspect of this letter is the disagreement with how the church preaches the gospel. There's strong disagreement with the way in which *Vision* preaches the gospel; and the letter contends that the success of

our efforts as the church in preaching the gospel is to be measured by the evidence of people coming into the church. The Father desires to call individuals, the author believes, and the question is why are so few being called?

Two examples are given of the disagreement with the way the church preaches the gospel through *Vision*. One is through a 2001 article in *Vision*, and the other one is part of the booklet *Big Questions, Straight Answers*. And again, I'm not going to go into those in detail right now. If you are interested we can discuss those, but I'm not going to go into those in detail.

A particular strong disagreement is the quoting of outside sources and authorities in sort of framing different biblical concepts. There is strong disagreement with the fact that tithes are used to support *Vision*.

The next section of this letter lists that there is a proper way to preach the gospel and that is presented in a separate document that the author had created in the days when Joseph Tkach, Sr. and Mike Feazel had asked him for input.

And then finally there is a passing comment about the concept of U.S. and B.C. Mention is made about the ministers' conference and the supposed effort on Mr. Hulme's part to change scriptural truth related to Israel. That's just a passing comment, not a very big part of the letter.

That's essentially the letter. That lays out, I hope, as fairly as I can, with removing the emotion involved, but that's the basic contention of the letter.

What I'd like to do in the remaining time is to look at these individual—at least some of the individual points that are made—and to discuss them with you. Let's look at them, let's weigh them, let's think about them together.

The first one I'm not going to spend very much time with, but just ask you a question to think about. The question is: should our support of leaders within God's church be contingent upon something? The letter begins very strongly that the support of this individual for Mr. Hulme is based upon something. If Mr. Hulme does that then there will be support; if he doesn't do that there won't be support. So the question that I'd like you to think about as a member of God's

church is: should our support for leaders within the church be contingent upon something? Enough said about that.

Let's go to the questions about government within the church. Now, the first section of this talks about the history of mankind's governance failures. Now every one of us would absolutely agree with the truth in the fact that men's failure to govern has always been an issue, especially those who have no interest in obeying God, and especially those who have never had God's Spirit. It's also true, certainly, that when Christ came to this earth that he taught his disciples that true leadership involved something very different from the model of leadership that exists here on the earth; not lording over, but rather viewing one's self in a leadership role as a slave.

Let's go now to Luke chapter 22, verses 24 through 30, and let's read this section. This is a familiar section of scripture. Luke chapter 22, verse 24 says:

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them would be regarded as greatest.

And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors.

But not so with you: rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.

For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves?

Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

You are those who have stayed with me in my trials.

And I assigned you, as my Father assigned me, a kingdom that you may eat and drink at my table in the kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes."

So it's clear that Christ did interject a brand new model, a different way of looking at leadership. He says he himself exemplified this leadership when he was here on the earth. We are to follow his example of the kind of leadership that he did when he was on this earth.

Now one of the things that he mentions here about the Gentile rulership is benefaction. Benefaction in ancient times was a reciprocal agreement. Kings gave gifts, favors to subjects, sometimes money, that sort of thing, and in return they expected honor, support, political support, sometimes depending on the situation votes, and it's essentially politics as we know it today.

The second aspect though of that was lordship. Christ pointed out that true leaders, the leadership role, is not about controlling people's lives, lording over them. It's about serving them. And the example is that we are to learn to serve like Christ did when he was on the earth. We are to mimic that sort of thing. So we're to step in the same sort of shoes as Christ did when he was on the earth, when it comes to leadership; that servant role of viewing one's self as a slave, not as one who lords over, or controls, or threatens, or coerces people to do things.

Now, I'd like to pause here because there seems to be an implication at this juncture, in the letter, that Mr. Hulme is trying to lord over us as the church and not serve as a servant. I don't know about you. I don't know how much contact you have personally with Mr. Hulme, but I find this very hard to understand how somebody could think that Mr. Hulme lords over the church.

Frankly, he's been accused of being too soft. He's been criticized for not taking action against people who don't always do what the church teaches.

The letter is very critical of a sermon, *Government, Gospel, and Godliness*; and in that sermon itself Mr. Hulme refers to the criticism that he's received for not taking action against members who have not completely followed what the church teaches. In fact he says in that sermon, "You cannot coerce people. You cannot make them do it." Nor does he try to coerce, or force or lord over us.

Later in that same sermon, referring to Paul, he says there was a problem. Paul had authority in the church, and he felt he had a duty to warn them that there was a problem. He couldn't make them do it. He could only warn.

Now this has consistently been Mr. Hulme's approach over the years, and also the direction he's given us as pastors. We don't threaten people. We don't try to intimidate them into doing things. We try to teach brethren in hope that they will consider what we have to say and be willing on their own to do what are shown from biblical principles. That's the approach that we've been given from Mr. Hulme, that's the approach that he follows, and that's the approach that's been in the church during the entire fifteen years we've been in the church.

This hasn't always been the case in the church. Especially for the younger generation, you wouldn't understand that years ago there were apparently some ministers who in fact did lord over members. I experienced it. Perhaps some of you did too. But I can tell you categorically Mr. Hulme does not support that approach, never has, and never will. I have even personally heard ministers tell Mr. Hulme that we need to be tougher on members who don't always do what the church teaches. He simply won't support that. And I think he's absolutely right in his approach.

We're not to lord over. We're to serve, we're to set examples, we're to teach what is right and hope that people will do that based upon their own free will, because coercion and lording over does nothing for anyone. So I find it very peculiar that somebody would suggest that his policies are somehow lording over.

Now back to the letter. It says that there are no examples of the exercise of "autocratic authority in the New Testament." And the example that is given is that Paul never even referenced his authority as apostle in dealing with Philemon.

Is that true? Let's go to Philemon, and let's take a look at verses 8 and 9; the book of Philemon, chapter I, verses 8 and 9. You can look at this in various translations. I'm reading the *New American Bible Version*, verse 8 says:

Therefore, though I have confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper—Paul is referencing his authority as apostle here—yet for love's sake I

rather appeal to you, since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

You see, that's not true. Paul particularly references his authority, yet he prefers that Philemon would voluntarily, out of his own free will, do the right thing. And the word here for order you is a Greek word that means exactly that: to command, to command you to do something. And I'd have to say that this is exactly Mr. Hulme's approach. He doesn't order anybody to do anything. He teaches, and he expects people will weigh that, and if they see that it's a godly principle he hopes, he expects, that they will follow it if they are being led by God's Spirit.

Another example in the letter is that the closest Paul comes to autocratic authority is the incident of incest in Corinth. And he says that in that case Paul is upset because he's forced to use his authority.

Let's go over to I Corinthians chapter 5, and take a look at verses 1 and 2, which is where Paul addresses this. Was that really what Paul was upset about? Was Paul really upset because he was forced to use his authority? Was it because he didn't want to exercise authority because he was under mutual submission and was forced to do so? Well, let's read I Corinthians, chapter 5, verses 1 and 2. It says in I Corinthians 5, verse 1, *ESV Translation*:

It's actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and the kind that is not even tolerated even among the pagans, for a man has his father's wife.

(2) And you are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

Brethren, I think it's clear that Paul isn't upset because he's somehow been forced to use authority. He's upset because the congregation was tolerant of the situation. How could people claiming to have the Spirit of God and living by God's law put up with somebody who's living in this sort of situation? That's what he's upset about. He's upset about the sin and the fact that the congregation has been tolerant of it.

Let's consider next the model for authority that's presented in this letter, for the model of authority in the church; that it's the family structure as set out in Ephesians chapter 5. It's important for us, and I would recommend that on your own time you go and look at Ephesians chapters 5 and 6, carefully; that you read the entire section of scripture yourself.

Ephesians chapter 5 is not about church authority. Now Ephesians 5, verses 22 through 33, does indeed give us an analogy of the relationship between Christ and the church; but the chapter itself is not addressing church government nor authority in the church. And I'll demonstrate that in a minute.

But let's look at this analogy for a moment. This is an analogy of marriage not the broader family structure. This section, chapter 5, verses 22 to 23, is not discussing family structure. It's discussing marriage relationship, a husband and a wife. See, God created man and woman at the outset of creation, and he said that they would have a special relationship characterized by unity. The two would become one flesh, just one flesh, no longer two individuals but one flesh.

And so Paul uses this analogy of a husband and wife becoming one flesh to help us understand the kind of unity the church is to have with each other and with Christ.

Wives are to submit to their husbands, as head of the one flesh, just as the church is to submit to Christ as the head of the body. Husbands are to not lord over their wives but they are to love their wives, to sacrifice for them just as—in the same way that Christ sacrificed for the church. But the analogy for the church is that of one flesh, a husband and wife, one body, which Paul elaborates elsewhere, and we'll turn to that in a moment. But it's not about a broader family unit. It's not talking about a husband and wife and kids and aunts and uncles, and that sort of thing. It's not talking about that. It's talking about the structure of a husband and wife because of the fact that the two are to become one, one body, one flesh. The idea of a family unit, looking at this and broadening it to the family unit, destroys the analogy; because God doesn't say, you know, the husband and the wife and all the children are to become one flesh. He never states that. But he does say that in the marital relationship that a husband and a wife will become

one, one flesh, one body. And Paul elaborates on that one body elsewhere, and we'll turn there in a moment.

If we look at the entire 5th chapter of Ephesians, we'll see that it's clearly not talking about structure or authority in the church. In fact, let's turn to Ephesians 5, verse 1. It's alleged that this verse, chapter 5, verse 1, tells us to imitate Jesus Christ's submission to the Father as a supposed first step in church structure. But Paul's not talking about church structure at all, nor is he talking about us imitating Jesus' submission to the Father. Let's look at it. Ephesians chapter 5, verses 1 and 2: it says:

Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children.

And whenever the Bible uses God in and of itself, it's almost always talking about God the Father.

Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children.

And walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God.

You see, it says that we are to imitate God the Father, and we're to follow Christ's example of walking in love, of sacrificing ourselves for each other. This isn't about submitting to the Father like Christ submits to the Father. The topic at hand is living a sacrificial life, sacrificing for other members in the church. While there is nothing incorrect with needing to imitate Jesus' submission to the Father—that's certainly true—Ephesians 5:1 and 2, simply does not address that topic. It addresses sacrificial love.

If we were to continue on then, Ephesians 5, verses 3 through 14, as an extended section warning us about conduct, how we behave, not about church structure. It's warning us about how we behave, and it says people who practice certain behaviours will not be in the kingdom of God.

Ephesians chapter 5, verses 15 through 17, is instructing us to be wise again in how we conduct our life. It's the theme that he's talking about. You see, he's talking about the behaviour within the church, not church structure.

Then in Ephesians chapter 5, verses 18 through 21, is a single Greek sentence that's critical for us to understand the verses that follow. Let's look at that. Ephesians chapter 5, verses 18 through 21: again, speaking about behaviour, Paul says:

And do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery—here's what we should be—but be filled with the Spirit.

(19) Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

(20) Giving thanks always for everything to the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

(21) Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

That's all one single sentence.

Now this particular letter that we're talking about, claims that chapter 5, verse 21 is central to church structure and authority. We are to mutually submit to one another. However, as we have seen, this whole section has nothing to do with church structure. It's about how we're to live.

In fact, Paul says here that we're to be filled with the Spirit, and then being filled with the Spirit is defined for us. It's defined as addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, it's being filled with the Spirit is singing and making melody; thirdly, being filled with the Spirit is giving thanks to God, and fourthly, it's submitting to one another.

But what does Paul here have in mind when he talks about submitting to one another? Does he mean that we should create a board and vote on things, and that's how we should run the church? Was that his intention here? Or does he mean that there is to be no hierarchical structure in the church? Do we just somehow submit to one another? Is that what he's intended here?

Well, we don't have to guess, because Paul defines exactly what he means by **submitting to one another** in the next set of verses. If we continue reading and

we don't stop, we see Paul telling us exactly what he means by submitting to one another.

In chapter 5, verses 22 to 33, discusses the example of wives in a marital relationship. That's one example of submitting to one another. Wives you need to submit to your husbands because that's the way God designed it.

If we continue, chapter 6, verses 1 through 4, discusses the submission of children to their parents. That's the second way we submit to one another. Children are submissive to their parents.

And if we continue in chapter 6, verses 5 through 9, he discusses submission of slaves to their master. That's the third example of what he meant by submitting to one another. In each case, Paul makes sure we understand that the submission is to be accompanied by the care for those in charge.

Husbands have to love their wives. They can't just lord over them. That's not the sort of submission he's talking about. Fathers are not to provoke their children, chapter 6, verse 4; and masters are not to threaten their slaves, chapter 6, verse 9.

So the idea that Paul is somehow supporting a form of a board, or some form of church structure without authority, is just plain wrong. This section is not even about church structure, with the exception of when Paul talks about the marriage situation he talks about them being one flesh, one body, just as it is with Christ and the church.

So plainly, Ephesians 5:21 is not talking about mutual submission as a model for church government, nor does Paul mean that we just submit (to each other: sound problem).

The section of the letter that discusses the church as a corporation, I'm not going to spend much time because I think it should be obvious to us that California law really is irrelevant as far as the church organization goes. The laws of man simply can't be used as a model for how the church is organized. We have to look to the Bible for the example. So let's move on.

If Ephesians 5 does not address church structure and authority, where does the New Testament address it? Well, let's go to I Corinthians chapter 12. Now, you'll remember in Ephesians 5, Paul does talk about the marital relationship and he talks about the fact that husbands are head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church. And he says, "Look, I'm talking about a mystery. I'm talking about the church because that marital relationship represents the church: the two shall become one flesh, one body."

Paul elaborates on that one body here in chapter 12, verses 12 to 14. Let's pick it up in verse 12, chapter 12. He says:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one, so it is with Christ.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and we're all made to drink one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but many.

You see, the church is depicted as a unified body, just like a husband and wife are pictured as a unified body, one flesh: many members, but unified in structure.

Now we have all been placed within the body by baptism, and we have all been given God's Spirit, and the choice of where we are in this church structure is the Father's choice. Let's take a look at that in verse 18. It says:

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as He chose.

Where we are in that body, whatever position we are, or without a position, or whatever it is, God has placed us there. The Father has placed us there, and either we believe that or we don't believe that. Our Father has placed us in the body of Christ as he personally chose. Christ is represented as the head. It's his body. And we fit somewhere within that body.

Paul explains further what he means by that in terms of offices within the church. Let's take a look at verse 28. He says:

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administering, and various kinds of tongues.

Brethren, this is a structure, and the fact that Paul numbers them shows that this is not a list of random offices where everyone just happens to submit to one another. Today we don't have this exact kind of structure. We don't have apostles, or we don't have prophets, but we have a structure, a hierarchical structure.

Now, frankly, we used to have a huge emphasis on structure in the church. I mean we used to have what we called an apostle—Mr. Armstrong was the apostle—we had evangelists, we had pastor rank ministers, we had preaching rank elders, we had local elders, we had deacons, we had deaconesses, and at one time we apparently even had super deacons.

All this emphasis on rank became just that, an emphasis on power. If you weren't ordained then you were some sort of nobody, or that at least is how you were made to feel. I hope you understand that under Mr. Hulme's direction we no longer have this heavy emphasis on rank. Mr. Hulme was ordained as an evangelist. When is the last time you have ever heard him refer to himself as an evangelist? He doesn't. He's a minister, just like I'm a minister. And our local elders are ministers. So we're in different roles and different responsibilities at any given time, but this idea of a hierarchical emphasis on power is gone, and it's been gone the entire time that we've been in the Church of God.

Structure and authority are certainly necessary and biblical principles, but it should never be the kind of authority that's depicted in the world around us. Christ's words in Luke 22 are especially important. The approach of a leader being better or more important in some way than somebody else is just plain wrong. The leader has to be the servant of all. Husbands must love their wives, must sacrifice, must put their needs first, make choices that are in their best interests. And I think that's why Paul follows up chapter 12, as he discusses the structure in the church, with I Corinthians 13.

Structure is important, but just as important for wives to submit to their husbands is the fact that husbands love their wives; husbands sacrifice for their wives; they don't lord over them. And so the concept of love is important in the church structure which Paul emphasizes here in chapter 13, and has to be the foundation of all we do no matter what office we hold. Think about these things!

Love is patient, isn't it? It's kind, it doesn't say mean things to each other; it's not envious; it's not—you know—I want your position, sort of thing. It doesn't brag about its talents and its abilities. It's not puffed up, it's not rude, it's not self-serving, it's not easily angered; it's not resentful; it's not glad about injustice; it rejoices in the truth; it bears all things; it's faithful in all things; it's always hopeful; it endures through it all; and it never ceases to be these things. It simply never quits, never reaches the end of its rope.

We have a structure in the church. We have a hierarchical structure in the church, but the undergirding are these qualities.

Now sometimes leaders get placed in offices who don't understand these concepts. That does happen from time to time. It has happened in the history of our church. But that doesn't make the concept of the structure wrong, does it? That's an important thing to think about, brethren. The fact that certain individuals have been in these positions and have abused their power doesn't make the structure wrong.

In the same way, sometimes, and perhaps more often than we would like to think, a man abuses his role as the head of the wife. Sometimes he comes to think that being leader means it's all about the wife and the family supplying his needs, his needs for respect, his needs for power, and the like. And of course he's got it completely wrong. He's not serving as a slave, as a little child. He's being a dictator. But the conclusion that sometimes gets drawn, then, when this happens, is that because it happened the structure is wrong. God got it wrong when he created the family structure. And some women think, "I'll never be under a man again," when that happens to them. "I'll never submit myself to that ever again." And while the feeling is totally understandable, it's wrong. God didn't get the design of the family wrong. The people in their roles

misunderstood their roles and abused their roles perhaps, certainly, but the structure is not wrong.

Now let me make something clear at this point. Mr. Hulme has not misunderstood his role as a leader in the church. He has led the church as a loving father leads a family. He has given himself in service, working extremely long hours in overseeing every aspect of the work. He doesn't dictate to us as members, he doesn't set church rules and try to enforce them through the pastors. At one time Mr. Hulme was being pressured to give us rules on what we should do and shouldn't do on the Sabbath, you know. What are things it's OK to do on the Sabbath? He's not going to do that. He's not going to set rules for us in that manner. He's not an autocratic leader. He teaches, and he wants us to voluntarily do the right thing without being forced, compelled, or threatened.

He doesn't get angry and resentful, but he's calm and firm. Is he perfect? Absolutely not! He has his flaws certainly. We all do as humans. But he's striving to do the right thing. And I find it very difficult to think that somebody would think differently. Especially when you look at where we have been as a church and what we've been under in the past.

Let's continue.

The letter addresses Paul's example, and one of the things that it says is that: "Paul did not take tithes in order to submit to the beloved children of the Most High." That he restrained himself so that he could serve the brethren. He decided that he wouldn't take tithes so that he could serve them better. And it is true that Paul didn't take tithes in Corinth. And he did occasionally make tents to sell and help support himself. But the question we should ask is: did Paul not take tithes from them because he insisted on supporting himself?

Let's turn to II Corinthians chapter 11, verses 7 to 9. In writing about this situation, and it is a very tense situation with the brethren in Corinth at this time and Paul's relationship with them, II Corinthians 11, verse 7, Paul says:

Or did I commit a sin by humbling myself, so that you could be exalted, because I proclaimed the gospel of God to you free of charge?

But notice verse 8:

I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so that I could serve you.

(9) When I was with you and was in need, I was not a burden to any one, for the brothers who came from Macedonia, fully supplied my needs. I kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.

You see, Paul didn't simply make tents so he didn't have to take tithes as is sometimes alleged. Paul was being supported in tithes by other congregations, especially Philippi. Why does he choose not to take tithes in Corinth? Well, when he first came to the area he would not have taken tithes because when you preach the gospel, you do it freely. But when they became a church, when they became congregations in that area, they were very quickly at odds with him. And not just—we don't really care much for Paul—they were at odds. Read I and II Corinthians. So, when they were at such odds why would he demand money under those circumstances? You see, there are indications that they thought he was even being fraudulent with money, because all of a sudden they stopped saving this fund that Paul was going to take to Jerusalem. And he has to plead with them in II Corinthians to begin again saving what they had obligated themselves to save so that he could take it to Jerusalem. This is probably why they quit saving this money for that fund.

So it became an increasingly difficult relationship with Corinth over the many issues, and particularly them listening to outsiders who taught them things contrary to Paul. These outsiders were being paid by the Corinthians, so Paul determined that he would never take their money because he wasn't in it for the money. You see, it was a principle that he was making against them is the reason why he chose not to take the money. Not because he was just this nice guy who wanted to serve the brethren, and simply, you know, be able to preach the gospel further because he wasn't taking their money.

Let's take a look at II Corinthians chapter 11, verse 12: He says:

And what I am doing I will continue to do so, so that I may eliminate any opportunity for those who want a chance to be regarded as our equals in the things they boast about.

His not taking tithes had nothing to do with his restraining himself so that he could serve them in a sense of feeling bad about them supporting him. This was an issue of disrespect that they had for him. They were bringing other “apostles” into the congregation to teach them, who were teaching them things contrary to what he taught them, and they were paying them. And Paul was not about to ask them to pay him when they had so much disrespect for him. But he was still taking tithes from other congregations.

The second question we could ask ourselves is: was Paul ever “an autocrat”?

Well, let’s define autocrat. According to several dictionaries, an autocratic leader is one who exercises control over all decisions with little or no input from those he leads.

I can tell you from my experience, anyway, Mr. Hulme is no autocratic leader. I’ve worked for many men and women over my professional life, and Mr. Hulme is the most approachable, considerate, and caring person I’ve ever worked for. As far as his ministry and his leadership, I admire him greatly. He sets a tremendous example for all of us.

However, we must not confuse autocratic with decisive. A good leader must listen to counsel and ideas and input, but a leader is never compelled to follow any one person’s advice. He’s to weigh advice; he is to weigh counsel, and he’s to make a decision that in his heart of hearts, with prayer and fasting, he thinks is the best decision to be made. A leader who’s not run by a board must make the best decision that he’s able based upon what he finds most convincing.

The same thing is true in a family structure. A husband and wife are to work together, they’re to discuss things, but they may be at odds on decisions that need to be made for the family. In the end the husband has to decide, doesn’t he? Now if he decides something that is going to be self-serving, then that’s wrong. But if he decides something that he fully believes, in his best ability, to be

the right thing for the family and it happens to be different than what the wife has suggested, then that's his duty and that's his obligation; and that's the role of a leader. And that's precisely what Mr. Armstrong did when he was alive, and that's precisely what Mr. Hulme does.

For those of you who have been in the church for a long time, you may recall a situation when Mr. Armstrong was alive when he was being highly criticized for flying a jet around the world, paying money to have visits with world leaders in order to preach the gospel to them. He drew intense criticism over that because he was spending millions and millions of dollars, allegedly wasting tithes, abusing tithes, was some of the language that people would use.

Did Mr. Armstrong back down because the pressure was so great that other people thought that he was doing the wrong thing? No, he stayed the course. He did what he thought was right because that's the duty and the responsibility of a leader.

If you make a decision contrary to what your experience tells you, then you're not being a leader at all.

The word autocrat is used throughout this letter to describe decisive actions against the situation. Paul didn't use his authority to demand all the things that he could demand, is what is alleged. Rather that he restrained himself to further the gospel. But the question is: did Paul only use his authority as a rare exception? Well, let's consider.

Once again in Corinth, division occurred. You'll remember the situation. In the early chapters of Corinthians we see that Paul's laying out the problem that some say they are from Paul, some say they are of Apollos, some say that they are of Peter. And it was more than just having an affinity of one for another. It involved criticisms, perhaps allegations of wrong doing; and again, some indications that Paul was accused of misappropriating funds.

Let's take a look at I Corinthians chapter 4, and let's take a look at verses 3 to 5. Paul says:

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you, or by any human court.

See, Paul is being judged by the Corinthian brethren. He's being accused of things that he didn't do. And Paul is saying, "Look, in the end it's a small thing if you judge me. It's a small thing if you accuse me." Continuing, he says:

In fact, I don't even judge myself, for I'm not aware of anything against myself, but I'm not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.

"I'm not the judge. God is going to judge me; Christ is going to judge me." Verse 5, he says:

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness, and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

You see, Paul is saying, "Look, if I have done things—if I'm hiding things from you, if I'm working as a conspiracy to do things, then God is going to reveal it. God's going to judge me."

So Paul wrote to correct their behavior as a loving father using his authority as an apostle to do so, and to try and end the division that was going on.

Let's drop down to chapter 4, we'll read verses 14 and 15, and he says:

I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you—and many translations put correct you—that's a correct translation of that—to correct you as my beloved children.

He's using his authority to correct them. Verse 15:

For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Was Paul just submitting to one another, or did he use his authority when he was an apostle when he needed to? Did he go to Corinth and call a meeting of the board to discuss this and to see if he was wrong about an issue or not? No! He exercised his authority.

Let's drop down to verse 17. He says:

For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my dear and faithful servant in the Lord. He will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

Notice verse 18:

Some have become arrogant as if I were not coming to you.

Some people were talking big, you know, as if will Paul never come? So I'm going to talk big. Verse 19, he says:

But I will come to you soon if the Lord is willing, and I will find out not only the talk of these arrogant people, but also their power.

That's a pretty strong statement. He says, you know, "We'll see if they are more than talk when I show up at their door."

This isn't a meek and mild person mutually submitting. This is an apostle using his authority, a church leader using his authority. Verse 20, he says:

For the kingdom is demonstrated not in idle talk, but with power.

He says, "I'll back it up with my power." Verse 21:

What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

Paul was more than willing to accept the challenge to his authority. He is not restrained in this manner. He is not backing down, and this is not about the incident of incest. He's asserting his power and he's willing to demonstrate it in person if need be. The apostle Paul used authority.

On one occasion, Paul is so upset with some who have caused division that he chose—he thought it was wise best not to visit them on a scheduled visit, because he was so angry. Instead he writes them a severe letter of rebuke. Let's take a look at II Corinthians chapter 1, beginning in verse 23 to chapter 2, verse 1. II Corinthians chapter 1, verse 23, he says:

Now I appeal to God as my witness, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth.

I do not mean that we rule over your faith, but we are workers with you for your joy, because of by faith you stand firm.

(2:1) So I made up my own mind not to pay you another painful visit.

Why was it painful? Because he was coming with authority, with discipline, but his decision to delay was to spare them from that.

Now, Paul was accused of being weak in person. He was probably a short guy, probably not too impressive, not a great speaker apparently, but wielding great authority in his letters. And he tells the Corinthians that he will certainly come with a heavy hand if he needs to.

Let's take a look at II Corinthians chapter 10, verses 1 and 2. He says:

Now I, Paul, appeal to you personally by the meekness and gentleness of Christ (I who am meek when present among you but full of courage towards you when I am away!)

And that's a sarcastic statement obviously.

(2) Now I ask that when I am present I may not have to be bold with the confidence that (I expect) I will dare to use against some who consider us to be behaving according to human standards.

You see, Paul will dare use his authority in person if somebody is falsely accusing him.

And it is in this context, brethren, that we read the next statement. Sometimes when we read this statement in a sermon or sermonette, we apply it in a general sense. But it's this context. People daring him, challenging him, and saying he's a meek and quiet person in person, but when he shows up he's not going to be very authoritative. He doesn't have the power to be authoritative. It's this context that he writes the following things. Chapter 10, verses 3 through 5:

For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards.

For the weapons of our warfare—Paul's not talking in a general sense—he's talking about his weapons of warfare—**our weapons of warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds.**

He's saying, "Look, when I show up, I'll show you the power that God has given me, the power by which I'll tear down strongholds."

We tear down arguments, he says,

And every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ.

This is not just a general statement about our Christian battle being spiritual arguments. This is Paul's personal battle with some of those in Corinth that are challenging his authority. And he says he'll tear down their arguments and arrogant obstacles. Let's take a look at verses 6 through 11. He says:

We are also ready to punish every act of disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

Does that sound like somebody who's weak and mutually submissive, and let's call a board meeting? I don't think so.

(7) You are looking at outward appearances. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should reflect on this again: Just as he himself belongs to Christ, so too do we.

(8) For if I boast somewhat more about our authority that the Lord gave us for building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of doing so.

(9) I do not want to seem as though I am trying to terrify you with my letters, (10) because some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but his physical presence is weak and his speech is of no account.”

(11) Let such a person consider this: What we say by letters when we are absent, we also are in actions when we are present.

Does that sound to you like somebody who is reluctant to use authority in the church; who only used it on a rare occasion? Or does it sound like somebody who thinks there is no authority in the church? That you just be mutually submissive and call a board meeting? I don't think so.

Let's consider the second major aspect of this letter which is the disagreement of how the church preaches the gospel. I think we could summarize the church's position on preaching the gospel this way.

First of all, the gospel is the announcement of the coming kingdom of God to this earth.

Secondly, following Mr. Armstrong's direction and example of the apostles, in order to have a message heard, in order to have a message read by the public, one has to put the message in ways that people will listen. If they will not even pick up a magazine or not even go to a website, our efforts are really wasted. So the church seeks to take every day issues, trends, news, within those topics, and introduce the idea that the Bible is in fact relevant today; that it speaks to us today. And the church is working on ways that when people find these things out and become interested, can learn more, as God calls.

A second point to consider is that God the Father calls and we do not. Our efforts don't do it. John 6:44 is a scripture we used to talk about a lot: **No man can come to me unless the Father which send me draw him.** God the Father does the calling. So, therefore numbers of people called cannot be a measure of our

efforts. It can never be a measure of our efforts. In fact, something to consider: if we think about the numbers that were called during the Worldwide Church of God era, we must also consider the quality of those numbers. How many of those people are still around? I think there is a legitimate question in asking, and we could never know the answer to this question, but I think it's worth asking: How many of those were really called? Or how many just joined because the fear, or because they thought was interesting, or religion was their hobby? There's no way to know that. Only God knows that.

But as Christ told the Jews, God can make sons of Abraham out of stones. So if he can do that, he can certainly not be deterred by our preaching the gospel if he wants to draw people to the church.

The next thing to consider is that God has called each one of us as co-workers in proclaiming the gospel to the world. But God has not called each of us to decide how to preach the gospel.

Sometimes we get into conversations about evaluating how the church is preaching the gospel, which are fine, but at the same time we have to understand that God hasn't called us each to decide how to go about that. That's what government and understanding of where God has placed us in the body becomes important. We are not all called to a democracy of God, where each is to vote or campaign about our way of doing things. We are called to a body, with Christ as the head, and we are members serving where God has placed us.

Now, that means we have to be confident of Christ's leadership. We have to be confident of his ability to address or correct whatever he thinks might be wrong within his body. God doesn't need the hand trying to be the eye. He doesn't need the ear trying to do the walking. If a member demands to have a say in an area that he or she has not been given, then that member is rebelling against the body.

You see, I'm a pastor, but my thoughts really aren't relevant as to how we go about preaching the gospel. Do I have opinions? Sure, I've got opinions. But are those opinions things that I should demand because I think my idea's better, and

Mr. Hulme ought to listen to what I have to say? Well, no! I've not been placed in that position. That's not my call.

And all of us as members have to realize where God has placed us in the body and what our role is and what it is not. The body works well when all the members perform their given function. But it doesn't work when we demand to have our ways.

Mr. Hulme, as the leader of the church under Jesus Christ, has been charged with leading the church, and that includes setting the direction of how we will go about preaching the gospel. Now, we might disagree with an approach, and that's fine. I mean we're all beings, we all have brains, we all have experiences, we all have ideas. We might have even better ways of doing things than what are currently being done. But the bottom line is if God has not placed us in a position to change something within the body, then we have no business demanding our way. We have to be content with just offering our ideas. If those ideas are not taken, if they're not accepted, then they're not accepted. And we have to be content that God will oversee what is chosen and what is not chosen.

But when we demand our way we create a crisis. When God has placed us in a prominent position within the body and we demand our way, we create an even greater crisis because we create division. With position within the church comes great responsibility.

Paul had some very harsh words to say about those who cause division. When we cause division we put ourselves into this definition. Everybody who goes about doing something that they know is going to cause division puts themselves into this definition. Let's look at Romans chapter 16, verses 17 and 18. Romans chapter 16, verse 17 says:

Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create dissensions (divisions) and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned. Avoid them!

For these are the kind who do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. See, that's what I mean by putting ourselves into these

definitions. When we cause division we make these define us. He says:
For these are the kind who do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By their smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of the naïve.

In passing this letter mentions the United States and British Commonwealth idea, or teaching, and I want to just comment a little bit about that. Mr. Hulme mentioned in his letter that he's created a study group, and this is mentioned briefly in the letter as well. I would just like to say that there is nothing to get upset about here. Mr. Hulme acknowledges that we have not said publicly anything about the U.S. and B.C. So he's established this group to consider what we might say and how we might say it.

The study group is to put together preliminary conclusions and then all the ministry will consider the conclusions, and will be given an opportunity to respond. But there's no need to be fearful when the church looks carefully at what we teach. No one's interested in error. Can't those God placed in leadership roles carefully consider what we teach without becoming suspicious? Without people becoming suspicious about what they are trying to achieve?

I think our history has really scarred us. Truth is always truth, and if we're interested in truth then we simply have to place our trust and faith in God that God will lead the church.

I'd like to share with you some closing thoughts. I'd like to discuss just a little bit these scars and the baggage from our past.

In the early 1990's leadership within the church began to change the identity of the church. Brethren, we're the body of Christ. What does that mean? Well, it means we're forgiven for our past sins through Christ's sacrifice. It means that we're given God's Spirit and he has made us a part of his very body. It means that we are charged with using God's Spirit, coupled with our own free will, to overcome sin, to imitate Christ who himself is just like the Father in character. It means we're being prepared to be kings and priests within God's kingdom, which Christ will bring to this earth. It means that we'll be resurrected and given eternal

life, and we will in turn help our fellow human kind, mankind, also enter the kingdom. It means that God's laws define human conduct. It means that God's Holy Days outline his plan for mankind, and it means as a body we are to preach and teach that message of hope to the world.

When the WorldWide Church of God began to no longer identify with these truths, and instead adopted the forms of the world's Christianity, they changed their identity. We were in a place, in a position of being unable to submit to God's call and be under the leadership of the church, which no longer identified itself as the church. I hope you see that difference. The changes that occurred in WorldWide Church of God were issues of identity, who we are, why you were called, what your purpose is. Under these circumstances where we could not continue to obey God and be under the leadership, we had to separate ourselves.

Now some, sadly, see a parallel with our current crisis. But there is no parallel. The question before us is questions over government and competing ideas of how to go about preaching the gospel. And they're competing ideas, because it's not Mr. Hulme by himself standing out there saying "This is the way we should preach the gospel." There are lots of people who agree 100% with the way we are going. I'm one of them! And there's a group of individuals who think that there's a better way.

So somebody has to choose, don't they?

But the current crisis is about that. It's not about identity and it's not about calling. In our feeble attempt to reconstruct the church, we, or some, I should say, decided God's government structure modeled after the kingdom of God was the problem. And so what followed WorldWide Church of God was a system of voting and boards that replaced the model of the kingdom.

Once again, the issue was an issue of identity. We, the church, are supposed to be the kingdom of God in embryo. An embryo is the beginning of something which grows into its fullest form. A democracy does not blossom into a kingdom. An embryo of a cat does not grow into an adult human being. And so, once again we were faced with an issue of identity. That's the issue: identity.

For the last fifteen years we've been placed in a church that has peace and growth, personal growth. That peace and growth has been the product of identity and government. Government keeps us united. When someone seeks to overthrow government, disunity results. The head keeps the body working, but if the parts rebel and refuse to cooperate, then the body self-destructs. If that disunity isn't ended, it will self-destruct completely.

So brethren, hang on to your identity. Know what your identity is. It's critical. God has called you personally. God has dealt with your past sins through the sacrifice of Christ, and God has given you his Spirit. God has placed you in the body of Christ, his church, the embryo of the kingdom of God. You have been tasked with using his Spirit to overcome sin and to learn how to rule as Christ rules. And you will be kings and priests when Christ returns to this earth to administer his government of God, and you'll be used to help your fellow man enter into eternal life.

The Sabbath, this weekly reminder, reminds us of God's presence. The Holy Days remind us of the plan that's being worked out. Things like clean and unclean meats are a part of our identity. The understanding of life, that man's not an immortal soul, is a part of that identity. These things, brethren, are our identity. They are what's important, and everything else—everything else is peripheral. Don't let peripheral things send you out of the church.

If we approach the church with the idea that we are poised to go somewhere else if the church says or does something we disagree with, then were we ever really in the church? That approach is in fact why so many dis-unified groups exist today. "I'll go along as long as everything is to my liking." Is that really how God would have us think? But conversely, is that the way our society has taught us to think?

Finely, brethren, I'd like to thank all of you in the Northwest for your obvious restraint in the situation. To my knowledge we have not had an issue like some other parts of the country with spreading some kinds of dissent around. Perhaps we're just out of the loop. Maybe we're just uninformed. We're not among those who know. And that would not be a bad thing. But if some of you did get

these things, to my knowledge you've not spread them. And frankly that is commendable because that is fruit of God's Spirit.

I sincerely hope that we can move forward from here and leave behind this dark time of dissension. I hope that we can move forward with the understanding, under the leadership of Mr. Hulme, to be united as God's people. I hope that we can put the distractions behind us and get back to work on what matters: your calling and the kingdom of God that we are preparing to be a part of. You have the highest of callings. Don't let distractions, peripheral things, peripheral matters that in the end don't mean a thing, cause you to lose sight of the goal to which you have been called.

Again, I'm more than happy to discuss any of this with any of you who might have questions. Just let me know and I'll be as open as we can be.