

Unity and Division – Part 2

Sermon by Mr. Eric Keefer

There are a lot of different topics that I'd like to be talking about, as I was thinking about what we might speak on this Sabbath; a lot of things that I think we need to focus our attention on. But I also feel compelled to continue to talk a little about some of the things that have been happening in the Church as well. I would much rather move on and think about the things that relate to our calling. I think that is one of the terrible outcomes of something like this, that it distracts us from concentrating on the things that are important, the things that God has called us to: overcoming sin, preparing ourselves for the Kingdom of God. We don't need these distractions, but we have them none the less.

I know that many still are wondering as they hear unsettling events, they hear things about various events that have occurred, and so I think it's important—even though I wish we could move on—at least at this point, to try to continue to address those questions, fears, doubts, that sort of thing. And I think that's another thing we can pray for; that hopefully soon we will be able to move on and go back to addressing the things that should capture our attention dealing with our calling, dealing with preparing for the Kingdom of God. These are things that we have been—our minds have been distracted from. I'm sure Satan is just happy as he can be as he distracts us from the things that we've been called to do. Nonetheless, it is important to take time in these sorts of crises to continue to address, if we need to, the things that are happening, or that we find happening among ourselves.

So there are a few things that I would like to speak with you about as we continue to deal with these issues. And I guess I would like to begin, this afternoon, just summarizing where we've been, what has transpired, and what are the issues. I think that's really the underlying thing that people continue to ask themselves. It simply doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense when you think about what has been presented as issues. What seems to be very erratic behavior on the part of many, including some prominent ministers, makes us stop and ask ourselves, "Well, what are the issues? What's going on? Why are we seeing these kinds of responses?" Let's rehearse for just a moment what has transpired.

We know a number of weeks ago a prominent minister in the Church sent a letter to Mr. Hulme and the Board, and he himself made that letter public. In that letter, nothing new, he criticized Mr. Hulme about his leadership and understanding of government, and he characterized *Vision* as not preaching the gospel. I think those are two of the main issues that were a part of that letter.

Shortly after that event, another prominent minister and pastor resigned. There has been some quibbling, I suppose, over whether he resigned, or he was terminated; but

the fact is, he said that he was no longer able to support Church leadership. Either way, whether you want to use the term “resigned” or “terminated,” the bottom line is that it was an effective resignation. When somebody says, “I will no longer do the job that you have asked me to do,” you say that to any employer, and that’s essentially your resignation. You are leaving. You are stopping! It’s not that you are forcing the employer to fire you. You have essentially left.

His specific issues weren’t made public, but it was clear that he did refuse to continue to support decisions that were made by the one that God has placed in charge of the Church at this time, Mr. Hulme, the physical head.

A third minister and pastor, which I think probably most of you already know by now—but if you don’t—Mr. Rodzai resigned recently. His letter was not made public in the same way that Mr. Andrews’ letter was, but the way things work, I did receive a copy of that letter through members who support Mr. Rodzai.

So I have seen that letter and I’ve read it probably a dozen times. It’s not as long a letter as Mr. Andrews’ letter, it’s a two page letter; and I’ve read it over, and over, and over trying to make sense of that letter.

Mr. Rodzai laid out his reasons for refusing to support Mr. Hulme and there were three: governance, our approach to the gospel, which is essentially *Vision*, and a fear—nothing more than a fear—of future U.S. and B.C. changes. He doesn’t know of any changes that are going to occur, he just fears that that’s the case.

So we continue, as members of God’s Church, to hear rumors of other ministers who are discontent with some similar sorts of things. So I think we have to ask ourselves, brethren, where does that leave us? What is this all about?

Well, I think it probably leaves many of us in doubt, in fear and confusion, and asking ourselves exactly what are the issues that are causing ministers to act, what seems, so very radical—radical decisions? What is it all about? There must be more to it.

My response comes from the only sources I know to go to, and that is Mr. Andrews’ letter and Mr. Rodzai’s letter. There is a commonality. There is a very strong dislike that probably verges on hatred for the magazine *Vision*. We’ll be talking a little bit more about that at the end part of this sermon.

This issue has become such an issue in their minds that they are no longer willing to accept decisions made by Church leadership. That’s the bottom line. They have refused to submit to the authority that God has placed over them. Yes, they are ministers. Yes, they have authority in the Church, but when they themselves refuse to submit to authority that is over them, then obviously there is an issue there.

How does one justify not being willing to submit to decisions that are made in the Church? Well, there's a fairly common pattern, and in this case they have, first of all, justified the refusal by creating a concept that simply doesn't exist in the Bible. That concept is this concept of **mutual submission**. Now that's not a biblical concept.

Now let's be clear here. **Mutual respect** is biblical. We must, no matter what position we are in the Church, have **mutual respect** for one another. We must—I, as a pastor, must respect you as a member; as somebody that God has called out of this world personally, and God has given you His Holy Spirit, and God has given you understanding just as He has me. The concept of **mutual respect** is most assuredly biblical, but the concept of **mutual submission** isn't even what Paul wrote in Ephesians 5. It's a misunderstanding, it's a misapplication, and it is, I think, in some ways, sort of an intentional misunderstanding.

Paul did not mean that we simply take turns submitting to each other in various roles. That's not the way a marriage works, that's not the way a parent and child relationship works; and when they were involved with slavery, bond servants and masters, that's not how that relationship worked either. It simply didn't work that way, and Paul never meant to imply that it should work that way.

Mutual respect is biblical, **mutual submission** is not biblical.

Secondly, what they are doing is, they are willing to lead others in that direction that they've chosen. I find this, as a pastor, highly troubling—highly troubling. And frankly, it scares me, to a degree, for those ministers that are involved in such things. I think we as pastors have been given a responsibility to shepherd God's flock, to take care of them. Not to lead them to our way of thinking, not to lead them off into a group on their own to “follow me,” as a person. Our job is to lead the congregations to support the body that God has put in place—the leadership that God has put in place. And as long as that leader has not left the Church in the sense of teaching, then it's our responsibility to be a part of that body, and it's our responsibility as pastors to make sure that we are leading in that direction. So it highly troubles me that this has occurred.

Now let me suggest to you something that I think has happened, and I want to do it via a personal story.

As a pastor, somewhere around the year of let's say 2006—I don't really remember what exact year it was—but let's just say it's somewhere around 2006—I put a Pastor's Update on a website. I thought through it, I wrote it out, I thought it was important, it fit with a sermon that I gave; and shortly thereafter I got a call from somebody who monitors the Church Website and was concerned with what I'd written.

The person thought that what I wrote was something that I clearly did not say. I could not understand how it could be misunderstood. It simply made no sense to me. And it upset me, frankly. The person in charge of monitoring and making sure what goes on the website is in line with Church teaching, thought that it could be misunderstood. I didn't see how it could be misunderstood, and I was frankly very troubled by the fact that they asked me to take it down. However, I took the posting down immediately.

It really troubled me though. I have to tell you it really troubled me, and I dwelled on it for a while. I thought about it, and it concerned me. I talked to my wife about it. It troubled her. She couldn't see how it could be misunderstood. Neither of us could understand why someone could misunderstand what I had written.

Finally though, after thinking about it and praying about it, I came to the understanding that it mattered very little in the scheme of things. Very little! My little article that I had placed on the web was not going to profoundly change anyone for the better. It made absolutely no difference whether somebody read that little piece that I put there or not. It was simply not important at all. Now it was important to me at the time, and it sort of upset me, and it sort of angered me that somebody thought it could be misunderstood because I thought it was clear as could be. But with time, I came to realize that it simply wasn't important. Somebody in charge asked me to take it down, so I took it down. And with time that anger that I felt dissipated and I was completely able to let it go with God's help. I prayed about it, and I simply let it go.

And I can honestly say at this point in my life it means absolutely nothing to me. I'm not even angry when I think about the subject any more. It's gone! It's gone! It troubled me at the time but it doesn't bother me a bit today. I understand that person's responsibility, I understand that they read it and they thought it could be misunderstood. So what's best for the Church? Well, what's best for the Church is if it could have possibly been misunderstood, the best thing is to take it down, regardless of what my ego said.

Now, however, if I had tucked that little event away in my mind and let it simmer and let it continue to stir me up, my discontent would have grown, wouldn't it? It would have sat back there in the back of my mind and it would have grown. I could have covered it up. None of you would have ever known that it was an issue. I could have kept it to myself. I could have kept it private. You would never have known that it was an issue and that it bothered me all these years, and I could have kept it inside of me.

And in time, other events that I experienced could have piled up on it until I got to the point where I was simply ready to rebel and refuse to support those that God has placed over me. That's what happens in these sorts of situations.

Now you might say to me, "Well and good! That could have happened! But how could this sort of thing have happened to so many ministers all at the same time?"

Well, discontentment grows with a common cause. That's the way it works. It works in congregations, and yes, it works among ministers. Again, brethren, like I said in the Bible Study, ministers are people. Ministers have the same sorts of issues that people in the congregations have. We're not immune to those things. We're not on some super high spiritual level. We all struggle against these sorts of human pulls. We all find that. And I have to just be frank with you. You know, there was a time where I was a member sitting in the audience listening to elders and listening to pastors and was not ordained. And there was a time that I was an elder, and there was a time when I was a pastor working in another job, and then there was a time that I'm a full time pastor. And when you go through those sorts of things you begin to see other ministers in a different light.

I tried to explain at Bible Study that often times we get confused because we see ministers that we hold in such high regard make bad decisions, and we think there must be more to it because that person would never do such a thing. But it just isn't the case. As you get into these different roles and you have conversations with these pastors whom you respected all your life, you begin to hear them say things that they wouldn't have said from the pulpit. You begin to hear their humanness come out. You begin to see, wait a minute, maybe these people aren't super spiritual, you know. Maybe they're much closer to me than I really think that they are in my mind.

What I'm trying to say, brethren, is that we're all human. We all fight the pulls of the flesh. We all make mistakes. And just because you've respected a minister so long doesn't necessarily mean that they're not in the wrong; that they're not fighting the same sorts of things that you and I struggle with, you know, anger, resentment. They had something happen that they let simmer in their mind and build up.

Discontentment grows with a common cause. Ministers who have a common dislike for *Vision* have found sympathetic ears with each other, and together they have helped one another grow more discontent. And I can tell you, I didn't believe it a few weeks ago, but I can tell you now, ministers have been talking. Pastors have been talking. They've gotten together, they've discussed these things, and they have sort of—I don't know what degree plans have been made—but they have gotten together and talked about these things privately. It's happened. It happened, I believe, at the minister's conference, although I wasn't involved in those conversations so I didn't see them, but I do believe that that has been the case.

It's abundantly clear that these ministers have collaborated. They use the same words, the same jargon in their letters, they use the same concepts, they quote the same scriptures, and they clearly support one another.

Now, many folks think to themselves: "There must be more to their discontentment. How could so many ministers be upset over what at least has been proposed as the problem?" There must be another shoe to drop, because it doesn't seem to make sense that this is really their issue. There must be something more.

And the result of that is many of us begin to have doubts about our leaders. It's very easy to interject doubts in the mind of a human being. It's very easy to say something, interject some doubt, and then you start to wonder, "Well, maybe there's more to it. We've been through situations where somebody said there was more to it, we didn't believe it, and there was! So maybe there is something to this sort of thing."

"Maybe Mr. Hulme's hiding something. Maybe he's just like Mr. Tkach. What's the rest of the story? What is it that these ministers know about Mr. Hulme that we don't? Is he ready to change something?"

These are the sorts of questions that get thrown out that maybe even have gone through your mind because the seeds of doubt have been planted in your mind. That to me is incredible. Those are tactics that Satan the devil uses undeniably.

Now I am confident, brethren, that there is no more. There is no shoe that's going to drop. There's nothing that's going to come out that we did not know about. I've talked to Mr. Hulme personally over the past couple of weeks. He's not this monster. He does not have a hidden agenda. There are not things that these ministers know that nobody else knows.

It is an issue of emotion. That's why it doesn't make sense to many of us. That's why the issue doesn't make sense, because it's an emotional issue. It's people being upset over decisions that have been made, and unless you are in that group of emotion it won't make sense to you. It doesn't make sense to me. It doesn't make sense to many of you that I've talked to. But you see, I'm confident there is nothing else hidden.

If Mr. Andrews thought there was more, why didn't he put it in his letter? He certainly didn't hold back in that letter. He had to know it wasn't going to be a good result when he delivered that letter. So if there's more, why didn't he deliver it in his letter?

If Mr. Rodzai thought there was more, why didn't he put that in his letter? The fact is, there just isn't any more. The facts are on the table.

Does Mr. Hulme have the authority, as the person that God has placed as the physical head of the Church, to set the direction of how we will preach the gospel? Ask yourself that. Does he? Our teaching has always been yes. Always! Fifteen years ago it was absolutely. There was no question in anybody's mind.

During Worldwide Church of God nobody questioned that Mr. Armstrong had the right to decide how the Church would preach the gospel. Nobody questioned that. Our teaching has never been that we needed to vote, or that we needed to see how many ministers supported one way or another. Why has that become an issue now? Everyone involved believed at one time that the person that was placed as the physical head of the Church had a responsibility to do that.

You see, we came out of a system of voting, didn't we? Most of us came out of a system of voting because we saw the fruits were so corrupt, and we returned to our roots of what Mr. Armstrong taught us.

I'd like to read from *Mystery of the Ages*, Mr. Armstrong's last major work, pages 256-257. Now, think back to the days in Worldwide, if you were old enough to be in Worldwide at that time. Think back to what he's talking about here. He begins this section by saying, "Understand this!" You know, Mr. Armstrong writes all capitals, exclamation points!

"Understand this! The CHURCH, as initially called in this life, is NOT YET capable of RULING the earth—of sitting with (Jesus) Christ in the THRONE where God Originally placed Lucifer—of administering THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD.

And THAT IS *WHY* God has placed HIS GOVERNMENT in his Church. That is *WHY* God's Church government is theocratic instead of democratic. That is why God has set ranks of government in his Church . . ."

Let's drop down a little bit, and he says a little later:

"That is *WHY* it is hierarchical in form—government from GOD at the top on down, not from the bottom up. Otherwise those at the bottom would be ruling GOD!

It is the SAME government by which Christ shall rule all nations beginning with the millennium!

And" he says, "that is *WHY* Satan has subtilely influenced dissidents in God's Church to become resentful and bitter over God's government—why some have gone out of the Church!"

This is in the '80's when he wrote this. He's talking about groups of ministers, if you recall, got together and became bitter and resentful over decisions that Mr.

Armstrong had made, and they left. Prominent ministers, ministers we respected, ministers we thought would never do such a thing, and they did it!

Do we believe what Mr. Armstrong wrote here? I think he's spot on. Government is often the issue in people's minds, not willing to submit themselves to the decisions that are made. It's not a question whether these decisions are godly or not. As we're going to look at *Vision*, *Vision* is not a magazine about—you know I don't know what they think it's about. We'll take a look at the articles in this present issue. I don't know how anybody could argue that it's not preaching the gospel.

How plain can this be? If Mr. Hulme has disqualified himself by leading us away from God, that would be one thing. But he has not! He's not done that. And it's a shame. It's un-describable why people would take his name and run it through the mud like they've done. He simply has not! This is a matter of some deciding they know better, and God has not put them in a position to make those kinds of decisions. And since God has not put them in the place to make those sorts of decisions, they are rebelling against those decisions.

I don't think God's arm is too short to put whoever He wills in that place to make those decisions. I just don't believe that God said, "Oops! I made a mistake! I put David Hulme there! I should never have done that! But now I'm stuck with him, so now I've got to create a rebellion to overthrow him."

That's not the way God works, brethren. If God has a problem with Mr. Hulme God will take care of it! If God wants us to change our approach, He certainly could have placed one of these ministers in his spot. But guess what? That didn't happen. He would have certainly done it without appealing to what amounts to be a public rebellion. God does not work that way.

However, if you still have questions and doubts, that's okay. I completely understand why you might not be as confident as I am. But my advice to you is, as it always has been, is to remain calm and wait on God. Let God fix it! If there is a problem, let God fix it, let God deal with it. If there is something hidden it will be revealed in time. I am confident that there is nothing hidden. But if there is, it will be revealed in time.

In the meantime, let's look at the issues of government and gospel, since that seems to be such a big issue in the minds of some. Let's look at two issues: government and gospel.

Now, some argue that **form** of government is not at issue. It's not that they disagree with the hierarchical form. What they say is at issue is **how we work together**, the brethren. That's not so! It **is** about form of government, because hierarchical forms of government work by having one person in an executive position that makes

decisions. That's the way a hierarchy works. He gathers counsel, he makes an executive decision, and everyone in the organization gets behind the decision, and then we move forward. That's how hierarchy works.

Now, some will complain, "Well, yes, but Mr. Hulme has not gotten any counsel. He's just gone off on his own, in his own direction."

And that's categorically false. He has received counsel from ministers; he's received counsel from members; he's received counsel from outside consultants on things that they know best, like how you optimize *Google* searches so that the Church comes out on top on certain phrases. There are, despite what many would like us to think, a number of ministers who absolutely agree with our current approach.

It's not a question of Mr. Hulme being out there on his own and everyone else saying, "You're doing it wrong!" It's an issue that there is a group that think we're going at it wrong, and another group that says, "No, we're going at it right." And Mr. Hulme has made a decision about what we're going to do, and he's moved forward. And that includes getting outside counsel on things that we don't have the expertise on inside the Church. Like I mentioned *Google* searches, or Social Media, those things.

What has happened is that some have banded together in a concerted effort to try to force Mr. Hulme to go in a different direction. And once again, that's not how hierarchical government functions. So it is about hierarchical government. That is at the heart of the issue.

Therefore, despite the fact some are saying it's not about form of government, it most assuredly is. If that was not the issue, we would simply not have ministers withdrawing their support from Mr. Hulme, attempting to lead congregations with them. That wouldn't be happening if it wasn't an issue of hierarchical government.

Those who argue that it is not about questioning hierarchical government often try to redefine hierarchical government this way. This is what they try to say. It's not about that, it's about something else. What do they do? Well, first of all they like to de-emphasize roles. In other words, they say, "Look, all ministers are the same. We're just all ministers." Now, you'll not hear them say that members and ministers are the same. You'll never hear that. But you'll hear them say, "All ministers are the same."

Then they will emphasize the fact that God the Father and Jesus Christ are at the head of the Church, which is absolutely true. But then they will de-emphasize any physical leadership at all saying that we're directly responsible to Christ.

Ephesians 5:21, as we've seen many times, gets twisted to mean an idea of **mutual submission**, which is pseudo-language for **democracy**, instead of seeing what Paul actually said: submitting to one another based upon the role that one finds themselves in. And then finally, Acts 15 is portrayed as a **ministerial pseudo-democratic board meeting**.

Let's look at Acts 15. Turn back with me to Acts 15, and let's look at Acts 15. What went on in Acts 15? What were the questions? How did it get decided? What was the response? Acts chapter 15, verse 1: verse 1 lays out the issue for us. Let me just set the stage here. What's happened is Paul and Barnabus had just gone on a first journey to Asia Minor. They have founded a number of congregations, many of these congregations being God-fearing Gentiles who were not circumcised. And Paul taught them that they didn't have to become circumcised to become part of the Church. They were simply baptized.

And Paul and Barnabus had returned and they are in the city of Antioch, and what's happened is some people from Judea, right around Jerusalem, have gone up to Antioch and have begun teaching the Church in Antioch that they need to be circumcised. Let's take a look at Acts 15:1. It says:

Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

So these men came from Judea to Antioch where Paul and Barnabus were located, and they began teaching the congregation that they had to be circumcised. That was a requirement to be a part of the Church. Verse 2:

And when Paul and Barnabas had a great dissention and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some of the others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning the issue.

"We need to get a decision on this," is essentially what's going on. "We need to be clear. We need to get an ultimate decision: what's the answer to this question?" So these Judeans who had come up argued that they most certainly had to be circumcised or they weren't legitimately a part of the congregation of God's people. And since they were unable to agree they went to Jerusalem to have their argument settled.

Let's take a look at verses 4 and 5:

When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the Church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.”

So once again the issue gets framed for us. It’s not an issue of whether they should keep the commandments or the Sabbath or anything of that nature. It is an issue of becoming a naturalized Jew. “Do these people have to become circumcised and become a Jew, essentially? Must they become circumcised and maintain the purity laws, put tassels on their garments, sacrifice at the temple, those sorts of things?” Verses 6 and 7:

The apostles and elders came together to look into this matter.

And after there had been much debate—

So they debated it. They laid it out. They laid the issues out. They considered the issues. There is a major difference of opinion going on. Peter stands up and Peter explains his experience with the Gentiles, in verses 7 through 11. Then Paul and Barnabus stand up and explain their experience, verse 12. And then finally James, the brother of Jesus, stands up and summarizes what’s going on with a couple of quotes from the Old Testament, chapter 15, verses 13 to 18.

What I want to direct our attention to is verse 19, because a decision is made by one person who is in charge at this point. Acts 15:19: this is James speaking:

Therefore it is my judgment—this isn’t we take a vote on it and this is what all the elders and apostles have agreed to—James says, “This is my judgment, that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles.”

James settled the case. James, a single individual, made the decision. While we hear only Peter, Paul, Barnabus and James’ discussion—Luke chooses to exclude the arguments of the other side—we know that there was clear disagreement. But in the end, it was James the brother of Jesus that makes the decision. There is no indication that they were all somehow magically now all on the same page. That those who were of the sect of the Pharisees who believed said, “I was wrong! You are absolutely right!” What did happen is that they all submitted to the decision. Let’s take a look at chapter 15, verse 25:

It seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabus and Paul.

Brethren, how did they become of one mind? They submitted to James' decision. That's how they became of one mind. They got behind the decision that was made.

Notice what did not happen. They didn't take a vote. James didn't say, "Okay! Now we've heard both sides. Let's take a vote of all the elders and apostles here and we'll see what the decision is." That didn't happen. It was not a decision based upon the majority. There was no polling the elders to see, "Well, how many feel this way, and how many feel that way?" There's no indication that they were all agreed with the decision. They agreed to support the decision. That's what happened.

And depending on how one constructs the chronology, it would appear that this decision remained a difficult one even after the decision had been made. Paul continues to experience trouble over this very issue. He writes about it in Romans, he writes about it in I Corinthians, he writes about it in Galatians, he writes about it in Ephesians, he writes about it in Philippians, he writes about it in Colossians, he writes about it in Titus.

It's not that they got away from this conference after James had made a decision and everybody stuck to that decision. They still had varying opinions. How they became of one accord is they agreed to support James' decision.

Now for fifteen years we've had peace and growth. Oh, that we could return to the months of October and September, and the summer. Oh, that we wouldn't have to be going through what we are going through now. We had peace. And the sermons were focused on things we need to do to move forward to prepare ourselves for God's Kingdom coming to this earth. Ministry and members submitted according to their role. That's why we had peace. What has now changed is that some simply have refused to submit to decisions. It's as plain and as simple as that. Ministers, pastors, have taken their refusal to support to the members that they serve. That's unconscionable in my mind, causing doubt and leading members away from Mr. Hulme.

Please consider something with me for a moment. At the 1st of November most of us—perhaps all of us—I'd certainly include myself in that—had no clue that there were any problems in the Church. I got a call from my sister who said, "Have you heard something going on? Because I'm getting—people here are telling me there are disagreements between this person and that person." And I said, "I don't know what you're talking about. I just got off a Pastor's Conference call, and to a man every single pastor reported peace and calm. So I think somebody's blowing smoke. I don't know what to make of that. It doesn't make any sense."

Every pastor said, "Everything's fine, everything's peaceful, everything's calm."

How is it in a span of less than a couple of months, brethren, entire congregations—or a majority of congregations—were very aware and completely on board with their pastor who had such strong disagreements with Mr. Hulme? How did that happen? Are you telling me in a period of two months those people, large numbers of people, had no problem, and then all of a sudden in that short period of time that now they're on board against Mr. Hulme?

That didn't happen, did it? It's taken months—who knows—a year? I don't know! But this has been going on for quite some time underground. This level of dissent does not occur over night. Let me be frank and speak plainly. Most of our Phoenix congregation, a congregation that I once pastored with people that we dearly love, are now aggressively against Mr. Hulme. How did that happen? How did that happen so quickly? When you didn't even know there was an issue two months ago? Think about that! Let that dwell in your mind. How did that many people, members, all of a sudden become so angry at the Church leadership, when two months ago we didn't even know there was an issue?

When I was pastor there, there was no indication of any kind of disagreement ever with Mr. Hulme, or with *Vision*. Now you might have said to yourself in the past, "I don't like this article, or that article in *Vision*." You might have even said, "I don't even really like the magazine." That's fine! Disagreement and difference of opinion is a part of being human, isn't it? We disagree on all kinds of things. That's a part of being human.

But again, speaking frankly, I can go back to the days of Worldwide when I was not a big fan of the *Plain Truth*. It just didn't interest me. I often found myself bored with the articles, and preferred Church booklets, Correspondence Course, listening to sermons, reading the Bible. I just wasn't interested in the articles that were written in the *Plain Truth*. But I would have never thought to myself, "I need to change the way the Church wrote the magazine." That would never have crossed my mind.

Why do some today think they need to take this kind of thing into their own hands? I don't get it! I don't get it!

As we bring this to a conclusion, let's look for a few moments at the latest issue of *Vision* Winter 2014, and let's take a survey of the articles in there. Is there something to this; that *Vision* doesn't preach the gospel; *Vision* doesn't talk about God; *Vision* doesn't talk about repentance?

Now it takes months to plan an issue of *Vision*, so the current issue has been in production for quite some time, long before the current crisis started. And even if it was, what difference would it make? Isn't this what individuals want anyway?

There's an opening article—take out yours and look at it when you get home. In the opening *Insight* article Mr. Hulme writes on the recent trip to Turkey, and he mentions the book of Revelation.

Let me just read a sentence. In conclusion, as he's concluding this article he writes: “Biblically, the setting and lessons of the seven (church) congregations to which John wrote deliver a powerful reminder that values are worth holding on to, and that compromise never brings lasting reward. Only by overcoming human nature's downward drag will we attain life forever.” And then he quotes Revelation 2 and 3.

It doesn't sound to me like he's trying to avoid mentioning the Bible or referencing God, or the fact that we need to change.

There's an article on *Apocalypse Now, Later or Never*, and it's introduced by a series of questions. “Of what value is the book of Revelation? Does it foretell the cataclysmic end of the world? Is it a historical record of events long past, or perhaps a call to moral responsibility? Or should it be read merely as first-century literature aimed at a first-century audience?”

Let me read a concluding paragraph. He says: “We cannot know exactly when the present age of human self-government will end, nor the precise moment of Jesus Christ's return; as He said, ‘Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.’” (Mark 13:32) “But the Apocalypse does unveil the kind of world that will precede His coming. And what we read there is eerily familiar. The book of Revelation also teaches those who have ears to hear, how they must distance themselves from the way of man—the ‘government of Caesar’—and anticipate, by their way of living, the coming sovereignty of God and His Son.”

There's a side box in that article entitled: “Time for Change?” It says, “Readers may sometimes wonder whether they are being drawn to a different way of life as a result of what they read in *Vision*. Some have said that the magazine's contents have already changed their life for the better. If this describes your experience and you feel the need to make more progress in understanding ‘the way of God,’ you may want to speak with someone on our staff trained to answer such questions. *Vision* is affiliated with the Church of God, an International Community, with representation in many countries.

Simply write one of the postal addresses listed on page 48 or e-mail us at ask@vision.org.”

Now there's an article entitled *Heliopolis, A City of Two Tales*. Let me read the concluding paragraph in this article.

After he quotes Isaiah, chapter 19, verses 24 and 25, he says: “The scene depicted is one of all people, regardless of where they come from, being able to know the true Creator God and being delivered from false ideas and systems that hold people unwittingly captive. However, once awake to the prospect of this future, the biblical requirement is for repentance, personal change and obedience to God’s law of liberty, which promotes right relationships toward God and fellow man.

Under the righteous rule of God the Father and Jesus Christ, the future for Heliopolis, for Egypt and for all people is bright and full of hope.”

Isn’t that a message about the coming Kingdom of God? About repentance, about changing the way we live?

There’s an article entitled, *A Line In The Sand*. I’ll read a mid-article paragraph. It says, “Still, according to the Bible an asteroid will not be the ultimate target of our (nuclear) weapons. As new geopolitical and economic alliances ebb and flow in the 21st century, how long will the nuclear status quo endure? Will we be able to keep our destructive power in check? It’s not a new question. Jesus’ disciples asked a first-century iteration of it. The world seems rather stable, they said, but you say it will not always be so: ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’”

The article then goes into Daniel 2, Matthew 24, Revelation 11, Revelation 19, Zechariah 14; and it concludes this way: “It is at that point when we will recognize the failure of our human ability to manage ourselves on a planetary, national and even personal scale. We will be ready to change. Finally we will understand that the ultimate line in the sand is the boundary between a contrived peace—the best that can be achieved through human power—and the true peace of God.”

There is a human interest story that follows on the former President Ronald Reagan. And then there is another article entitled *Getting Off The Grid*. After quoting Exodus chapter 20, verses 8 through 11, which is the Sabbath commandment, it says: “Obedience to this command would keep them in contact with the Creator and His creation. It would give them spiritual focus after six days of physical work. It would bring them back to center and give them peace of mind. By observing this law they would understand more deeply as they meditated and practiced rest. Doing would lead to understanding. It was, of course, a specific day: the seventh day, Saturday.”

The conclusion is: “Why not accept the challenge and begin resting on the day made by a loving God for humanity? Rest, relax, reconnect.”

There is a side box that says: “The Church of God, an International Community, . . . observes the seventh-day Sabbath . . . If you would like to know more, please contact us . . .”

There is an article called *Meditation, The Search For Inner Peace*. I'll read a mid-article sentence: "As we embark on this path, we realize that a relationship with God involves conforming to the way of life that, when put into practice, leads to happiness and joy, to peace and patience, to a truly rewarding and fulfilling life."

The conclusion is: "But if we wish to attain the source of love, true peace of mind and the path to God, we will need to embark on more than a mystical self-improvement program. God declares: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.' (Revelation 21:6) This crystal-clear and pure water is freely available to all, but to find it we must first acknowledge our thirst and then seek to quench it in the right place."

Brethren, you and I may not like the way *Vision* is written. Maybe this article, maybe that article, maybe the way the magazine is written, but I think it is simply untrue that *Vision* does not preach the gospel. Whether you would do it personally one way, or I would do it personally another way, makes absolutely no difference. We've not been placed in that position to decide, have we? We've been placed in the body where it pleased the Father, and those the Father has put in place make those kinds of decisions. It's foolish to say that *Vision* doesn't preach the gospel because it most assuredly does.

Brethren, let's stay the course. Please don't get caught up in the negativity that has pulled so many under. It is not about substance. It's about emotion, it's about anger, it's about resentment, it's about bitterness. Don't get pulled in to that.

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