

# Unity And Division

December 19, 2013

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## I. Introduction

Over the course of the last several weeks, the peace we have enjoyed over the last 15 years has been threatened. The threat of dissention and division within the Church, whose very signpost as God's people is to be love and unity, is something we all need to take very seriously. As the body of Christ, we need to ask God for healing and for His steady hand of comfort, strength, and guidance to be on each of us.

It is particularly upsetting and confusing when men, leaders, of whom we have respected and have been taught truth, take actions that seem out of character

This afternoon I want to address with you as your pastor, some things I believe are important for all of us to consider and attempt to add some clarity to the recent events. I believe that openness is critical at times like these. And I intend to be as open as I can be with the facts, but without disparaging anyone. If you continue to have questions, please let me know. I will again be as open with you as I possibly can.

The current situation and threat to our unity climaxed in a letter written by Mr. Andrews to Mr. Hulme and the Church board. The letter was, frankly, highly critical of Mr. Hulme's leadership. While the tone of the letter was not kind, expression of disagreement in itself, was not necessarily wrong, but what made this an issue for the entire Church, was his sending the letter to various members in the Church with express permission to send it to anyone they wished. Some of you received it, while others did not. As I understand it, when Mr. Hulme spoke nationwide, many of you had not yet received the member letter nor were you aware of what had transpired.

I do believe, however, since this letter has been made public to some, that it is important that all of you know the basic contention of the letter, so that you don't have to wonder and be tempted to speculate about what the issues are or are not. The letter itself is obviously written under emotional duress, and is in my opinion very cutting, accusatory, and corrective in tone. I will not read the letter to you because of that, (the tone gets in the way of what's being said) but I do want to lay out the basic contention of the letter. What is the issue or issues?

It is my intention to remove the basic tone of the letter and present to you the basic contention. When anyone attempts to put someone's word into other words, there is always the danger of misinterpreting. While I will do my absolute best not to misinterpret, nonetheless, you must be aware that I'm human and that is possible.

It is a long letter and we must be content with a summarized version. Following the letter, I want to give you some things to consider as God's people who are striving to make ourselves ready for the Kingdom of God as a member of the Church of God.

## II. Basic Outline of the Letter

- a. Begins: Support for Mr. Hulme has always been contingent upon Mr. Hulme's efforts to "move heaven and hell the way Mr. Armstrong had tried to, to preach the gospel."
- b. Government in the Church
  - i. Mr. Hulme's teaching/understanding of government is the issue – "autocratic" ruler

- ii. Biblically based government is something leaders in the Church don't seem to understand; pattern:
  1. Those in authority come to believe they are qualified to rule
  2. When they fail, they selectively misuse scriptures to excuse failings
  3. Misuse scripture to justify their acquisition, possession, and retention of authority
- iii. History of man's governance failures
  1. Problem with human government is its inability to govern itself
    - a. Adam & Eve
    - b. Pre-flood
    - c. Post-flood
      - i. Even Israel with God's laws failed
  2. Jesus gave the Church a new model for governing
    - a. Lk 22:24-30 – not lording over, but serving one another
    - b. We must learn this model of service or we will never rule in the Kingdom
    - c. This will be the model for eternity
- iv. There are no examples in the New Testament of the exercise of "autocratic authority"
  1. The case of Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon would be the where we might expect to see it, but Paul doesn't even reference his authority as an apostle.
    - a. Paul simply appeals to Philemon as a brother
  2. Corinthian incest incident is as close as Paul comes to exercising that kind of authority
    - a. But in that case, Paul is upset that the congregation forced him to use authority
- v. Model for authority in the Church is the family structure as set out in Eph 5
  1. The Father has primary and ultimate authority over all
  2. Jesus is in complete submission to the Father
    - a. Eph 5:1 tells us to imitate Jesus' submission to the Father
  3. Christ head of the Church
    - a. Eph 5:22-33 shows the parallel of authority structure in the family and in the Church
      - i. Husbands are head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church
        1. Eph 5:24 makes plain that the Church is subject to Christ, not any man, including Paul
      - ii. Husbands are to love (serve) their wives as Christ loved (served) the Church
  4. Eph 5:21 explains the manner in which authority is to be exercised within the Church: mutual submission
- vi. The Corporation: Church of God, aIC is governed by CA law
  1. CA law requires that ultimate authority resides in the board of directors, not an individual
  2. Therefore, the Board is the highest authority for a non-profit organization
  3. Since the Bible requires us to respect the law of the land except where it contradicts the laws of God, and
  4. Since the law does not contradict the laws of God,
  5. This is how the Church should operate
- vii. Considering the family model and the Corporation model
  1. Authority rests with Christ, under the Father's ultimate authority
  2. Christ demands mutual submission, not autocratic rule
- viii. Paul's example
  1. Paul was no autocrat

2. Example: Paul chose not to take tithes
  - a. Paul made tents as his source of income
  - b. He had the authority to take tithes
  - c. He restrained himself and imposed self-limits on his power
  - d. In this way he submitted himself to the beloved children of the Most High to serve them
- ix. Misuse of authority in the Church is major cause of fracturing in the COG in the modern era
- c. Adverse affects of the government in the Church
  - i. An example is given regarding the clarification and guidelines given regarding the blessing of children
- d. Disagreement with how the Church Preaches the Gospel
  - i. Strong disagreement with the way in which Vision preaches the Gospel
  - ii. Success is to be measured by evidence of people coming into the Church
    1. The Father desires to call, so why are few being called?
  - iii. Two examples are given – 2001 Vision article & Big Questions – Straight Answers booklet
  - iv. Of particular strong disagreement is the quoting of outside sources
  - v. Strong disagreement with the fact that tithes are used to support Vision
- e. Proper way to preach the Gospel is presented in a separate document from the days when Joseph Tkach, Sr. and Mike Feasel had asked him for input
- f. Passing comment about US & BC
  - i. A mention is made about the Ministers' Conference and the supposed effort on Mr. Hulme's part to change scriptural truth related to Israel.

### III. Analysis of the Letter

- a. Should our support of leaders within God's Church be contingent upon something?
  - i. The only contingency and can see in the Bible is Paul's admonition to follow him as he follows Christ
  - ii. Would that include agreement with the approach of preaching the Gospel?
- b. Government in the Church
  - i. History of mankind's governance failures
    1. It is absolutely true the list of failures of men to govern; especially those without God's spirit
    2. It is also true that Christ taught His disciples what true leadership involved – not lording over, but rather viewing oneself in the role of a slave

**Luke 22:24-30** <sup>ESV</sup> A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. <sup>25</sup> And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. <sup>26</sup> But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. <sup>27</sup> For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. <sup>28</sup> "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, <sup>29</sup> and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, <sup>30</sup> that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

- a. Benefaction in ancient times was reciprocal: Kings gave gifts and favors to subjects in return for honor, support, votes (essentially politics)

- b. Christ pointed out true leadership is not about controlling people's lives (lording over them) it is about serving them
  - 3. There seems to be an implication at this juncture in the letter that Mr. Hulme is trying to "lord over" and not serve as a servant
    - a. I personally find this very, very hard to understand how someone might think that Mr. Hulme "lords over" the Church
    - b. Frankly, he's been accused of being too soft; criticized for not taking action against people who don't always do what the Church teaches
    - c. This letter is very critical of the sermon Government, Gospel, and Godliness
      - i. In that sermon, Mr. Hulme refers to the criticism he has received for not taking action against members who have not completely followed what the Church teaches. He says:

"You cannot coerce people. You cannot make them do it."

- ii. Later in the 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 when there was a problem. He couldn't make them do it; it could only warn."

- iii. This has consistently been Mr. Hulme's approach in the Church and the direction he has given us as Pastors
          - iv. We don't threaten people; we don't try to intimidate them into doing things; we teach and brethren are to consider and willing do what they are shown from Biblical principles
          - v. This has not always been the case in the Church. Years ago there were at least some ministers who did in fact "lord over" members. I experienced it, and perhaps you did too, but I can tell you, categorically, Mr. Hulme does not support that approach at all.
          - vi. I've 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 will not support that...and I think he is absolutely right in his approach
        - ii. There are no examples of the exercise of "autocratic authority" in the NT
          - 1. Example: Paul never even references his authority as an apostle in dealing with Philemon. True?

**Philemon 1:8-9** <sup>NAU</sup> Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you *to do* what is proper,<sup>9</sup> 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—

- a. Paul specifically references his authority, yet, he prefers that Philemon would voluntarily, out of his own free will, do the right thing
          - b. This is exactly Mr. Hulme's approach
        - 2. Example: Closest Paul comes to exercising autocratic authority is the incident of incest in Corinth. In that case Paul is upset because he is forced to use his authority

- a. But was that really why Paul was upset? Was it because he didn't want to exercise authority and was forced to do so?

**1 Corinthians 5:1-2** <sup>ESV</sup> It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you..

- b. Paul isn't upset because he has somehow been forced to use authority; he's upset because the congregation was tolerant of the situation
- iii. Model for authority in the Church is the family structure as set out in Eph 5
  - 1. Eph 5:22-33 does indeed give us an analogy of the relationship between Christ and the Church, but the chapter is not addressing Church government nor authority in the Church
    - a. The analogy regards the marriage, not the broader family structure
    - b. When God created man and woman, He said that they would have a special relationship characterized by unity: the two will become one flesh; no longer two but one
    - c. Paul uses this analogy to help us understand the kind of unity the Church is to have with each other and with Christ
      - i. 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
      - ii. Husbands are not to "lord over" but are to love their wives (sacrifice for them), just as Christ loves (sacrificed) for the Church
      - iii. The analogy for the Church is that of "one flesh" or one body, which Paul elaborates elsewhere. It's not an analogy of a family unit. A family unit destroys the analog.
  - 2. But the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter is not about structure or authority in the Church
    - a. Eph 5:1 does not tell us to imitate Jesus' submission to the Father, as a supposed first step in Church structure

**Ephesians 5:1-2** <sup>ESV</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

- i. We are to imitate God the Father; we are to follow Christ's example of walking in love; sacrificing ourselves for each other
- ii. While there is nothing incorrect with needing to imitate Jesus' submission to the Father, Eph 5:1-2 does not address that. It addresses sacrificial love.
- b. Eph 5:3-14 is a warning about our conduct; people who practice certain behaviors will not be in the Kingdom
- c. Eph 5:15-17 is instructing us to be wise in how we conduct ourselves
- d. Eph 5:18-21 is a single Greek sentence that is critical to understand the verses between this and 6:9

**Ephesians 5:18-21** <sup>ESV</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- i. This letter claims that 5:21 is central to Church structure and authority – we are to mutually submit to one another; however, as we have seen this is not about Church structure at all, but how we are to live
- ii. We are to be “filled with the Spirit” and that is defined:
  1. addressing one another in psalms/hymns/songs
  2. singing and making melody
  3. giving thanks to God
  4. submitting to one another
- iii. But, what does Paul have in mind when he talks about “submitting to one another?”
  1. Does he mean we should create a board which and vote on things?
  2. Or, does he mean there is to be no structure in the Church? We just somehow submit to one another?
- iv. Paul defines what he means by “submitting to one another” in the next set of verses:
  1. 5:22-33 discusses the submission of wives in the marital relationship
  2. 6:1-4 discusses the submission of children to their parents
  3. 6:5-9 discusses the submission of slaves to their masters
  4. In each case, Paul makes sure we understand that the submission is to be accompanied by care from those in charge:
    - a. Husbands must love their wives (5:28)
    - b. Fathers must not provoke their children (6:4)
    - c. Masters of slaves must not make threats (6:9)
- v. The idea that Paul is supporting some 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 the marital/one flesh/one body comment)
- vi. Plainly Eph 5:21 is not about “mutual submission” as a model for Church government; nor does Paul mean we just submit to each other...
- iv. The Church’s corporation “Church of God, aIC” is governed by CA law
  1. I won’t spend much time on this, it should be obvious that California law is irrelevant to our Church organization
  2. Laws of man cannot be a model for how the Church is organized; we must look to the Bible for our example
- v. If Ephesians 5 does not address Church structure and authority, where does the NT address it?

**1 Corinthians 12:12-14** <sup>ESV</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-- and all were made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

1. The Church is depicted as a unified body of many members but unified by structure (marriage)
2. We have all been placed into Christ’s body by baptism and given God’s Spirit and the choice of where we are is the Father’s

**1 Corinthians 12:18** <sup>ESV</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

3. Our Father has placed us in the Body of Christ as He personally chose. Christ is represented as the head – his body. We fit somewhere in that body.
4. Paul explains further what he means in terms of offices within the Church

**1 Corinthians 12:28** <sup>ESV</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

5. This is a structure; the numbering shows that this is not a list of offices where each just submits to one another.
  - a. Today we don't have this exact kind of structure; we don't have "apostles" or "prophets" etc. but we do have a structure
  - b. Frankly, we used to have a huge emphasis on structure: apostle, evangelists, pastor rank, preaching elder rank, local elder, deacon, (at one time we had "super deacons"), deaconess,
  - c. All this emphasis on rank became just that; an emphasis on power. If you weren't ordained, you were a nobody, or that is how you were sometimes made to feel. Under Mr. Hulme's direction, we no longer have this kind of heavy emphasis on rank.
  - d. Structure and authority are necessary and Biblical, but it must never be the kind of authority that is depicted in the world around us.
  - e. Christ's words in Luke 22 are especially important: The approach of the leader being better or more important in some way must never be so among us. The leader must be servant of all. (Husbands must love their wives – sacrifice; put their needs first)
6. This is why I Cor 13 follows this discussion of structure; structure is important, just as it is important for wives to submit to their husbands. But just as important is the concept of love – this has to be the foundation of all we do no matter what office we hold
  - a. patient, kind, not envious, does not brag, not puffed up, or rude, not self-serving, not easily angered, or resentful, not glad about injustice, rejoices in truth, bears all things, faithful in all things, always hopeful, endures through it all, and never ceases to be these things – it simply never quits or gives up or reaches the end of its rope...
7. We have structure, we have a hierarchy in the Church, but the undergirding are these qualities
  - a. Sometimes leaders are placed in office who don't understand these concepts; that does happen from time to time. That does not make the concept of structure wrong.
  - b. In the same way, sometimes (more often than we would like to think) a man abuses his role as leader of the family. Sometimes he comes to think that being a leader means it's about the wife and the family supplying his needs (respect, power, likes, etc). Of course, he's got it completely wrong; he's not serving as a slave or a little child, he's being a dictator.

- i. The conclusion that gets drawn is that because this happens the structure is wrong. God got it wrong when he created the structure. Some women think, I'll never be under a man again!
    - ii. While the feeling may be understandable, it is wrong. God didn't get the design of the family wrong; the people in the roles misunderstood and abused the roles.
  - c. Let me make something clear here: Mr. Hulme has not misunderstood his role as leader of the Church.
    - i. He has led the Church as a loving father leads his family
    - ii. He has given himself in service, working long hours, overseeing every aspect
    - iii. He does not dictate to us as members; he doesn't set "Church rules" and try to enforce them through Pastors
    - iv. He teaches; he wants us to voluntarily do what's right without being forced, compelled, or threatened
    - v. He doesn't get angry and resentful; he's calm but firm; not perfect, but striving to do the right thing himself
  - vi. Paul's Example
    - 1. Paul did not take tithes in order to submit to the beloved children of the Most High – he restrained himself so that he could serve the brethren
      - a. It is true that Paul didn't take tithes in Corinth; he did occasionally make tents and sell them to support himself
      - b. Did Paul not take tithes from them because he insisted on supporting himself?

**2 Corinthians 11:7-9** <sup>NET</sup> 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? <sup>8</sup> I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so that I could serve you! <sup>9</sup> When I was with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone, 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.

- i. Paul didn't simply make tents so that he didn't have to take tithes as is sometimes alleged.
    - ii. Paul was being supported by other congregations; especially Philippi
  - c. Why didn't he take tithes from Corinth?
    - i. When he first came he would not take money from them
    - ii. Soon they were at odds with him; why demand money under those circumstances
      - 1. There are indications that they thought he was even being fraudulent with money since he didn't tell them he was being supported by Macedonia
      - 2. This is probably why they quit saving money for the fund Paul was taking to Jerusalem
    - iii. It became increasingly a difficult relationship with Corinth over many issues and particularly them listening to outsiders who taught other things
      - 1. These outsiders were being paid, so Paul determined he would never take their money to demonstrate he wasn't in it for the money, like his adversaries were



**2 Corinthians 11:12** <sup>NET</sup> And what I am doing I will continue to do, 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.

2. His not taking tithes had nothing to do with his restraining himself so that he could serve them in the sense of him feeling bad about them supporting him
3. This was an issue of their disrespect for him; they were bringing other “apostles” into the congregation to teach them and they were paying them. Paul was not about to ask them to pay him, when they had so much disrespect for him...
2. Was Paul ever an “autocratic?”
  - a. “Autocratic” defined
    - i. An autocratic leader is one who exercises control over all decisions with little to no input from those he leads
    - ii. Mr. Hulme is not an autocratic leader
      1. I’ve worked for many men and women over my professional life
      2. Mr. Hulme is the most approachable, considerate, and caring person I’ve worked for
      3. As far as his ministry and leadership, I admire him greatly; he sets a tremendous example for us
      4. However, we must not confuse “autocratic” with decisive
      5. A leader must listen to counsel, ideas, input, but a leader is never compelled to follow a person’s advice nor even the majority
        - a. A leader, who is not run by a board, must make the best decision he is able based upon what he finds most convincing
        - b. The same works for any one of us
          - i. We might go to a series of financial counselors to get advice as to where we might invest
          - ii. We are not compelled to follow any particular advice, but rather we think about what we have been told and we make the best decision
        - c. This is precisely what Mr. Armstrong did and what Mr. Hulme does
  - b. The word “autocrat” is used throughout this letter to describe decisive action against a situation
    - i. Letter: Paul was no autocrat, the closest he came to this kind of action was the case of incest in Corinth
    - ii. Letter: Paul’s standard approach was his example of not exercising his right to take tithes thereby imposing limits on himself to serve God’s people
      1. Paul didn’t use his authority to demand all the things he could have demanded (was not an autocrat)
      2. Rather, he restrained himself to further the Gospel
  - c. Did Paul only use his authority as an exception?
    - i. Division occurred in Corinth (Paul, Apollos, Peter, etc)

1. It was more than just having an affinity towards one over the other, it involved criticisms, perhaps allegations of wrong-doing (some indications that some had accused him of misappropriating money)

**1 Corinthians 4:3-5** <sup>ESV</sup> But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup> For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. <sup>5</sup> 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.

2. So, Paul wrote to correct their behavior as a loving father, using his authority as an apostle to do so; to end division

**1 Corinthians 4:14-15** <sup>ESV</sup> I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you (correct you) as my beloved children. <sup>15</sup> 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.

3. Was Paul just “submitting to one another” or did he use his authority as an apostle when need?

**1 Corinthians 4:17-21** <sup>NET</sup> For this reason, I have sent Timothy to you, who is my dear and faithful son in the Lord. He will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. <sup>18</sup> Some have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God is demonstrated not in idle talk but with power. <sup>21</sup> What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

4. Paul was more than willing to accept a challenge to his authority; he is not restrained in this matter. He is not backing down, but asserting his power and willing to demonstrate it in person if need be. Paul used authority.
- ii. On one occasion Paul is so upset with some who have caused division that he chooses to not visit them on a scheduled visit. Instead he writes them a severe letter of rebuke

**2 Corinthians 1:23-1** <sup>NET</sup> Now I appeal to God as my witness, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth. <sup>24</sup> I do not mean that we rule over your faith, but we are workers with you for your joy, because by faith you stand firm. NET 2:1 So I made up my own mind not to pay you another painful visit.

1. His decision to delay was to spare them from his zeal
- iii. Paul was accused of being weak in person, but wielding authority in his letters. He tells the Corinthians that he will certainly come with a heavy hand if need be:

**2 Corinthians 10:1-2** <sup>NET</sup> Now I, Paul, appeal to you personally by the meekness and gentleness of Christ (I who am meek when present among you, but am full of courage toward you when away!)- <sup>2</sup> 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.

1. Paul will dare to use his authority in person if someone falsely accuses him
2. It is this context that Paul tells us what he is battling in the Corinthian congregation is spiritual

**2 Corinthians 10:3-5** <sup>NET</sup> For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards, <sup>4</sup> for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments <sup>5</sup> and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ.

3. This is not just a general statement that our Christian battle is spiritual warfare; this is Paul's personal battle with some who are challenging him in Corinth
4. He will tear down their arguments and arrogant obstacles

**2 Corinthians 10:6-11** <sup>NET</sup> We are also ready to punish every act of disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> I do not want to seem as though I am trying to terrify you with my letters, <sup>10</sup> because some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but his physical presence is weak and his speech is of no account." <sup>11</sup> Let such a person consider this: What we say by letters when we are absent, we also are in actions when we are present.

5. Does this sound like someone who is reluctant to use authority in the Church? Or does it sound like someone who thinks there is no authority in the Church?

c. Disagreement with how the Church preaches the Gospel

i. The Church's position on preaching the Gospel might be summarized as follows

1. The gospel is the announcement of the coming kingdom of God to this earth
2. Following Mr. Armstrong's direction and the example of the apostles, in order to have a message heard, one has to put the message in ways people will listen; if they will not even pick up a magazine, or go onto a website, our efforts are wasted
3. The Church seeks to take everyday issues, trends, news, and within those topics introduce the idea that the Bible is relevant and speaks to us today
4. The Church is working to create ways that people can learn more as they care to; as God calls

ii. God the Father calls; we do not (Jn 6:44)

1. Numbers of people called can not be a measure of our efforts
2. If we think about numbers called during the WCG era, we must also consider the quality of those numbers. How many are still around? Legitimate question is were they really called?
3. As Christ told the Jews, God could make sons of Abraham from stones. If He can do that, He certainly isn't deterred from drawing those He wills to the Church

iii. God has called each of us as coworkers in proclaiming the Gospel to the world, but God has not called each of us to decide how to preach the Gospel

1. That is where government and understanding of where God has placed us in the body
2. We are not called to a democracy where each of us is to vote, or campaign for our way of doing things

3. We are called to a body, with Christ as the head and we as members serving where God has placed us
  - a. That means we must be confident of Christ's leadership and His ability to address or correct what might be wrong in His body
  - b. God doesn't need the hand trying to be the eye; or the ear doing the walking
  - c. If a member demands to have a say in an area he or she has not placed, then that member is rebelling against the body
  - d. The body works when all the members perform their given function
- iv. Mr. Hulme, as the leader of the Church, under Jesus Christ, has been charged with leading the Church
  1. That includes setting the direction of how we will go about preaching the Gospel
  2. We might disagree with an approach; that's fine, we are all humans with a brain
  3. We all have opinions on various things; we might even have a better way of doing things, but the bottom line is, if God has not placed us in a position to change something, we have no business demanding our way; we have to be content with offering ideas
  4. 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
    1. Paul has some very harsh words for those who cause division
    2. When we cause division, we put ourselves into this definition

**Romans 16:17-18** <sup>NET</sup> Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create dissensions (or divisions) and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned. Avoid them! <sup>18</sup> 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 naive.

- d. US & BC study group
  - i. This is mentioned in this letter briefly
  - ii. There is nothing to get upset about here;
  - iii. Mr. Hulme acknowledges that we have not said much publically about US & BC
  - iv. He established this study group to consider what we might say, and how we might say it
    1. The study group is to put together preliminary conclusions and then
    2. all the ministry will consider the conclusions and will be given the opportunity to respond
  - v. There is no need to be fearful when the Church looks carefully at what we teach; no one is interested in error; can't those God has placed in leadership roles consider carefully what we teach without some being suspicious?
    1. Our history has really scared us;
  - vi. Truth is always truth; if we are interested in the truth, then we simply have to place our trust and faith in God that He will lead us

#### IV. Closing Thoughts

- a. Scars and baggage from our past
  - i. In the early '90s leadership within the Church began to change the identity of the Church
    1. We are the body of Christ
      - a. Forgiven of past sins through sacrifice
      - b. Given God's spirit and made part of Christ's body

- c. We are charged with using God's spirit coupled with our free will to overcome sin and imitate Christ, who, himself is just like the Father in character
      - d. We are being prepared to be kings and priests within God's Kingdom which Christ will bring to this earth
      - e. We will be resurrected and given eternal life and we will in turn help our fellow mankind also enter that Kingdom
      - f. God's laws and standards define conduct
      - g. God's Holy Days outline his plan for mankind
      - h. As a body, we are to preach that message of hope to the world
    2. WCG leadership began to no longer identify with these truths and instead adopted the world's form of Christianity
    3. We were 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
    4. Under these circumstances where we could not continue to obey God and be under the leadership we had to separate ourselves
    5. Some, sadly, see a parallel with our current crisis
      - a. But there is no parallel
      - b. The question is over government and competing ideas of how to go about preaching the gospel; not about our identity and calling
  - ii. In our feeble attempt at reconstructing the Church, we (some) decided God's government structure (model after the Kingdom) was the problem
    1. A system of voting and boards replaced the model of the Kingdom
    2. Once again, the issue was identity
    3. We the Church are the KOG in embryo; or perhaps the seeds of the Kingdom
    4. An embryo is the beginning of something which grows into it full form
    5. A democracy does not bloom into a Kingdom; an embryo of a cat does not grow into an adult human
    6. And so we were once again faced with issues of identity
  - iii. For the last 15 years we have had peace and growth; that peace and growth has been the product of identity and government
    1. Government keeps us united; when someone seeks to overthrow government disunity results
    2. The head keeps the body working; but if a part rebels, and refuses to cooperate, then the body self-destructs if that disunity is not stopped
- b. Hang on to your identity
- i. Your identity is really the only thing that matters – defined
    1. God has called you, personally
    2. God has dealt with your past sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ
    3. God has given you His spirit
    4. God has placed you in the body of Christ; His Church; the embryo of the KOG
    5. You have been tasked with using His spirit to overcome sin and to learn how to rule as Christ rules
    6. You will be Kings and Priest when Christ returns to the earth to administer the government of God and you will be used to help your fellow man to enter into eternal life
    7. The Sabbath – that weekly reminder of God's presence
    8. Holy Days – reminder of God's plan He is working out

- 9. Clean/Unclean meats are part of that identity
- 10. The understanding of the life – man is not an immortal soul
- 11. These things, brethren are our identity; they are important; all else is peripheral
- c. If we approach the Church with the idea that we are poised to go somewhere else if the Church says something we disagree with
  - i. Then we are not really in the Church to begin with
  - ii. This approach is in fact why so many disunified groups exist
  - iii. I'll go along as long as everything is to my liking; is that really how God would have us think?
  - iv. Or, conversely, is that the way our society has taught us to think?

V. Conclusion

Finally, brethren, I would like to thank all of you in the Northwest for your restraint in this situation. To my knowledge we have not had an issue like some other parts of the country with spreading this kind of dissention around. Perhaps we are just out of the loop? Not among those who know? That would not be a bad thing. But if some of you did get these things, you have not spread them to my knowledge. That, frankly, is commendable and 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 we can move forward under the leadership of Mr. Hulme; to be united as God's people. I hope we can put the distractions behind us and get back to work on what matters: the preparation work for God's Kingdom.

You have the highest of callings. Don't let distractions cause you to lose sight of the goal and the work to which you have been called.

I am more than happy to discuss any of this with any who might still have questions. Let me know if I can help.