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### **CHRISTIANITY NEVER WORKS IF ...**

Have you ever watched a debate between two politicians with opposing points of view?

One politician spells out his views. In the process he presents what seems to be sound evidence why the view of his opponent is wrong, weak, flawed or dangerous; and why it must therefore be rejected. Does the other politician then acknowledge the evidence that has been presented against his own position? No, of course not.

The second politician will **ignore all the evidence** against his own position; and instead present true or imagined problems with the first politician's position. He may also present real or supposed benefits for the position he himself holds, while denying the problems his opponent has pointed out.

Back and forth they go, without either politician ever acknowledging any merit for all of the arguments that have been presented by the other person. No matter what information or facts are presented by one party, **the other party will never change their mind** or their position.

Now some of the voting audience listening to those two politicians may in some cases change their minds, and be swayed to support the person they had previously not considered supporting. But the two politicians themselves never change, and never accept the arguments of their opponent. They staunchly maintain their own positions, even in the face of contradictory evidence.

That's politics, right? But it is actually much more than just politics. It is also religious people who defend the false doctrines they teach and hold to. Those who defend false doctrines will never acknowledge the faults in their own reasoning. So yes, the above scenario is much more than just politics. In actual fact **that is human nature on full display!** A major feature of human nature is that it **denies all the evidence that contradicts its own position.**

A politician can never be argued into accepting the truth that contradicts his own position. And similarly for religious disagreements, no human being can ever be argued into accepting the truth of God! Human nature in an unconverted person will **completely and blatantly ignore all the evidence** that contradicts the person's own position on whatever the issue might be.

So the title of this article refers to the following situation:

**Christianity never works if we have to be argued into accepting the truth of God.** If we don't freely accept the truth of God **without** somebody having to argue us into accepting the true teachings of the Bible, then in such circumstances our eventual later acceptance of the truth is not really worth anything.

## **CHURCH GROWTH IN THE 60s AND 70s**

Back in the 1960s and 70s the Church of God grew very rapidly in membership numbers. There were large numbers of visit requests from readers of the Church's literature, as well as from people who had listened to the Church's radio programs. Many of those people were then baptized and became members of God's Church.

Now some of the new people we visited in those years had already learned and accepted many of the correct biblical teachings before their first visit, teachings in which the Church of God differs very emphatically from the teachings accepted by most of the churches of this world. They already understood the things that were explained in the booklets and articles they had received. And they were eager to change and to learn more.

**But there were also other people** who accepted some of the things they had learned from the literature, and therefore they wanted to become a part of the Church. But they also disagreed with certain other doctrinal booklets they had received. And when we visited people like that for the first time they didn't so much have questions about certain teachings or certain Scripture explanations, as **they had arguments lined up** to challenge and to disagree with certain teachings or certain Scripture explanations presented in the Church's literature. They believed that their own position was right, and that the Church's explanation was wrong.

Does that sound familiar, regarding any of the people you may know?

They would start out by defending some things that were at odds with the explanations provided by the Church. They would appeal to certain Scriptures they believed the Church had not applied correctly. In such situations we would deal with one Scripture at a time. In many cases this involved a lengthy argument-type of discussion, and eventually some of these people accepted that the explanation they themselves had presented for a specific verse wasn't in fact correct, and the verse didn't actually support the conclusion they wished to draw from that Scripture. Many times this took a lot of refuting false claims or false assumptions and deductions such people had made.

Sometimes that was the end of all arguments about the Church's teachings. But at other times, once the Scripture they had presented was shown to not support their position, **they immediately switched to a different Scripture**, to supposedly prove the same point which their first Scripture had not been able to prove. And so another lengthy argument-like discussion eventually showed that this second Scripture also did not really support the point which their first Scripture had not been able to prove.

**An example** might make this situation a bit clearer.

Let's say the people in question accepted the Sabbath and the Holy Days, but they did not believe that Jesus Christ has always existed with God the Father. Instead they believed that God the Father had created Jesus Christ at the same time when God had created all the angels.

So we asked: why do you believe this? What Scriptures tell us that Jesus Christ was supposedly created

by God the Father?

They would then present their most important Scripture, which supposedly proves their position. So we demolish that argument, showing quite clearly that the Scripture they have presented does not at all prove that Jesus Christ was created by God the Father.

So do they then accept that their belief is wrong? No. Instead they then present a different Scripture to prove their position. Once again we demolish their argument based on that Scripture.

Do they then give up and acknowledge that Jesus Christ has always existed with God the Father? In many cases: no, they don't.

And so they present another Scripture ... and another one ... and another one, etc., all in an attempt to supposedly prove the belief that Scriptures one and two and three and four and five had not been able to prove. The claims they make for each of these Scriptures are methodically demolished (that's what I do!), and eventually they run out of Scriptures to supposedly prove that God the Father had created Jesus Christ.

They also realize that there is no way we are going to baptize them as long as they believe that Jesus Christ was created together with all the angels. And so **eventually they are argued into accepting the truth** that Jesus Christ is not a created being, that He has in fact always existed with God the Father. And eventually they are baptized by some or other minister.

In some cases they still harbored some beliefs that are not correct, but they kept this to themselves. In some cases it was only many years later (i.e. after Mr. Armstrong had died) that they revealed that **they had never accepted certain correct teachings** and correct explanations of certain Scriptures. But they had kept their disagreements with some of the Church's beliefs to themselves.

When this is the case for a baptized man or a baptized woman, then they are likely to not really be converted; they are likely to not really have God's holy spirit dwelling within them; and they are likely to stop attending the Church at some point in the future.

As I said at the start, it never works when someone has to be argued into accepting the truth of God.

### **WHY IS THIS SO?**

Their initial arguments against some truth that has been presented to them reveal that their minds are not open to accepting the truth. Their initial critical arguments against biblical support for a true teaching, any true teaching, show that their minds don't comprehend spiritual knowledge. As the Apostle Paul explained:

For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so **the things of God knows no man, but (through) the spirit of God.** (1 Corinthians 2:11)

The Greek expression translated as “but the spirit of God” is “ei me to pneuma tou theou”. The particles “ei me” express a negative conjunction, meaning “except for” or “except through”. In other words, in this verse Paul is not comparing what a man knows compared to what the spirit of God knows. That would not be a meaningful comparison.

Rather, with this statement Paul is comparing two different possible states of a man, and the understanding available in both states. Paul is **comparing a man who does not have God’s spirit with a man who does have God’s spirit.** The only one of these two men who can comprehend “the things of God” is the man who does have God’s spirit. That is the point Paul made with this statement.

Now when people cannot understand a correct biblical explanation that is presented to them, then it shows that God is not leading them or guiding them into an understanding of the truth of God. As the Apostle Paul explained a few verses later:

But the natural man **receives not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him:** neither can he know *them*, because **they are spiritually discerned.** (1 Corinthians 2:14)

Paul's statements in this verse are illustrated every time someone argues against clear and correct biblical explanations. Their arguments show that they are not capable of understanding “the things of the spirit of God”.

Now lest you misunderstand ...

### **QUESTIONS vs. ARGUMENTS**

There is a big difference between people having genuine questions, and people presenting arguments to defend their own wrong position. Genuine questions are questions that are looking for understanding. And such questions are always good.

Presenting points to defend one’s own position are arguments. And that includes insincere questions. Insincere questions are not looking for understanding. Instead, **insincere questions only pretend to look for information**, when in actual fact their real purpose is to expose a supposed flaw or weakness in the other person’s position.

We find examples of both of these situations in the gospels.

1) When Jesus Christ explained to the Pharisee Nicodemus that we must be born from above (see my article “What Does The Bible Teach About ‘Born Again’”), then Nicodemus didn’t argue. Nicodemus

only asked a genuine question: “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” See John 3:1-4.

Nicodemus was not defending any position of his own. He was sincerely looking for understanding. **And this type of question is always very good.**

2) The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. And in order to support this belief they came to Jesus Christ with a totally insincere and completely fictional trick question about seven brothers supposedly all having married the same woman. Their question “therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven?” was not at all looking for information or for understanding. See Matthew 22:23-33.

Their trick question was supposed to prove that there cannot be a resurrection. And after Jesus Christ had demolished their foolish argument, **none of them changed their minds** and said: okay, we were wrong and now we accept that there must be a resurrection from the dead. No, they all continued to deny that there will be a resurrection. **This type of question is totally insincere**, and it always reveals an attitude that is not willing to change. And **insincere questions are always bad.**

When you believe that you already know the correct answer, then your question will obviously not be looking for information or understanding, because you believe that you already know the correct answer.

It is with this type of question that “it never works when their argument is destroyed”. When this type of argument is defeated, the people involved don’t really change their minds. They will continue to believe whatever they believed before their argument was destroyed. They can never be argued into accepting the truth.

Asking insincere questions exposes one aspect of human nature!

However, genuine questions that are looking for understanding are always good; and they are never to be treated the same way as insincere argumentative questions. So genuine questions are not included in the discussion in this article. This article deals with people whose argumentative questions challenge the truth.

## **NEVER TRY TO ARGUE PEOPLE INTO ACCEPTING THE TRUTH**

Let’s look at the example Jesus Christ set for us. In John chapter 6 Jesus Christ said the following:

**No man can come to Me, except the Father who has sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:44)**

When God the Father “has drawn somebody”, then they will understand correct teachings when those

correct teachings are presented to them. They may have honest questions, but they don't argue against the truth. On the other hand, when God has not "drawn somebody", then that person will argue against the truth of God. They will be **critical of the truth**.

So how people respond when they are exposed to the truth is one indicator for whether or not God is drawing them. That is the process Jesus Christ applied throughout His ministry. He presented true teachings and then left it up to people to decide for themselves how to respond. He never argued anyone into accepting His teachings.

What Christ's own ministry showed is that initially large numbers of people responded **for the wrong reasons**! They wanted to see miracles. Or they wanted free food. But in time Christ presented some pretty blunt teachings. And that was when many of "His disciples" said the following:

Many therefore of His disciples, when they had heard *this*, said, **This is a hard saying; who can hear it?** (John 6:60)

So here "His disciples" didn't understand a teaching which Jesus Christ presented to them. **What did Jesus Christ do in this situation?** Did He argue them into accepting His teaching? Did He reason with them? Did He try to express His teaching in clearer, more easily understood terms? Was He concerned that He was perhaps being misunderstood?

How did Jesus Christ handle this situation?

He let the chips fall where they may!

Instead of explaining His teachings more clearly, **Jesus Christ confronted His disciples** with the statement: "does this offend you?" (verse 61). No pleading or arguing or explaining. Instead He only made the message stronger by stating that He would ascend into heaven (verse 62).

The result was that ...

From that *time* **many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him**. (John 6:66)

Those disciples didn't have the right frame of mind, and it would have been a waste of time to try to argue them into understanding the truth of the teachings Jesus Christ was presenting to them.

When all these disciples left Jesus Christ, He turned and said to His 12 apostles: well, are you guys also leaving? Or in King James English:

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, **Will you also go away?** (John 6:67)

Christ did not try to reason with them or to argue with them. He wasn't holding anyone back. He simply asked a plain question. They were free to make up their own minds.

Here is Peter's reply to Jesus Christ's question.

Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And **we believe and are sure** that You are that Christ, the Son of the Living God. (John 6:69)

The key is always what we really believe and are sure of!

We cannot be argued into believing something. We either convince ourselves or we will not be convinced.

Keep in mind that most of those disciples who "walked no more with Him" had witnessed dozens of healings and other miracles. None of those miracles had really caused them to make a total commitment to Jesus Christ. Godly miracles never make a lasting impression on an unconverted mind.

Consider also that many of those disciples who left Jesus Christ had actually been baptized by Jesus Christ's disciples (see John 4:1-2) on Jesus Christ's instructions. And they left. Now after Pentecost when "about 3,000 souls" (Acts 2:41) were added to the original 120 disciples (Acts 1:15), did that include any people who had been baptized in John 4:1 and then left in John 6:66, and then returned in Acts 2:41? I don't know. Just wondering.

The point is:

Jesus Christ preached the truth, often in difficult to understand terms (i.e. in parables), and when people in general didn't understand the correct meaning of what He had said, then He mostly made no attempt to clarify things for them. Christ left it totally up to people themselves to decide how to respond to the teachings He was giving them: accept the teachings or reject them.

Jesus Christ was never afraid that people might misunderstand the things He was telling them. Christ knew full well that God the Father would only open the minds of those people **who started out with a right attitude towards God**.

Jesus Christ explained this to His apostles as follows:

He answered and said unto them, because **it is given unto you** to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but **to them it is not given**. (Matthew 13:11)

To all those people who start with a wrong attitude towards God Himself, it is simply "not given" to

understand the truth. And the people to whom it is “not given” are the ones who invariably argue against the truth, and challenge correct teachings.

Here is what we need to recognize:

It never depends on the truth of God having to be explained in perfect terms, made as clear as possible. No, **even a truth that is not explained perfectly** in a crystal clear way **is going to be understood** by those people “to whom it is given”; “it” here being a good understanding of God’s truth.

“It is given unto you” means “**understanding**” **is given to you**. And “to them it is not given” means “**understanding**” **is not given to them**. And it never works when people to whom God has given understanding attempt to reason, let alone argue, with people to whom God has not given understanding. We cannot prove spiritual truths to people to whom “it is not given”.

That simply never works!

Rather, we have to accept the fact that it simply has not been given to the vast majority of people to understand the things of God. And **we cannot change that!** Only God the Father decides to whom to give the ability to understand the things of God. All other people are incapable of understanding the truth of God.

When we recognize this fact, then we should never attempt to argue someone into accepting the truth of God. Such attempts are doomed to failure. In fact, in many cases when their arguments have been defeated and shown to be invalid, it only makes people more resentful and more determined to hold fast to their wrong beliefs. It is just like the old adage ...

**“He that is convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still.”**

That’s human nature. In fact, almost 400 years ago, back in the 1600s, Samuel Butler expressed this understanding as follows:

“He that complies **against his will**,

Is of his own opinion still,

Which he may **adhere to, yet disown**,

For reasons to himself best known.”

Butler recognized 400 years ago that for reasons of their own, people may pretend to reject a false teaching which they have always believed, when in actual fact they staunchly continue to hold fast to that false teaching. No argument has changed their minds. They simply pretend to have changed their minds,



in order to be accepted by certain other people.

This is also true when it comes to how people deal with the truth of God. For the sake of being accepted, some people may pretend to accept the explanations they have been given, when deep-down they don't accept those explanations at all.

This is a huge problem, because God is first and foremost looking to see how we use our minds. When a human mind refuses to accept the truth which has been proved to the person, then there is no point in any further discussion.

## **THOSE WHO OPPOSE THE TRUTH**

Let's look at some of the instructions Paul gave Timothy. These are guidelines for how God's servants are to deal with certain situations.

But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strife. (2 Timothy 2:23)

Paul is saying that **certain questions should not be answered!** I have already referred to insincere questions, which really have a hidden ulterior motive. Then there are also questions that are plain foolish. Never attempt to give serious answers to stupid questions.

And then there are questions that are "unlearned". Those are questions where **the questioner doesn't know what he is talking about**. The questioner is completely out of his depth with the question he has asked, and he is simply not capable of understanding the correct answer, because, in Paul's words, he is not "learned".

That's like someone who knows nothing about Greek making emphatic claims for certain Greek statements in the text of the Greek New Testament. He simply doesn't have the teaching, training, background, etc. that applies to the subject of his own assertions. He is not in a position to deal with a response that expounds the Greek text in question. Therefore when correct answers contradict his views, he is not able to understand why his view is wrong, and he is only going to argue with those correct answers. He is "unlearned".

Paul's statement "they do gender strife" means that answering such "unlearned" questions will only result in arguments. Indeed! Implied in Paul's statement is that the questioner has **a wrong opinion or understanding**, which the questioner is not about to give up, no matter how thoroughly his "unlearned" views are refuted, and how well his question is explained.

So Paul continued to say:

And **the servant of the Lord must not strive**; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, (2

Timothy 2:24)

The Greek word translated as "strive" literally means "to fight". In this context it means "to engage in a war of words". In modern terms it means "to argue".

**God's servants are not to argue about the truth of God.** And one aspect of not getting into arguments about the truth is to avoid answering questions that invariably result in arguments. When we know in advance that certain people hold certain wrong views, views they will vigorously defend, then there is no point in exposing the flaws and errors in their views. They are just like the Sadducees who rejected the belief in a resurrection, and no arguments were going to make them change their minds.

Paul understood that people cannot be argued into understanding the truth. And as far as "teaching" people is concerned: we can only teach those people who have a teachable attitude to start with. If they do not have a teachable attitude, then there is no point in trying to reason with them.

Personally, I have no intention of ever "debating" any biblical doctrine with anyone.

All "debating" is a form of arguing. And like our two politicians at the start, **debaters have a wrong mindset.** Debaters don't evaluate the merits of what the other person has said. They are only focused on looking for ways to refute and to discredit what the other person has said. They are looking for things they can criticize. They reason **exactly the same way that Satan reasoned**, when God challenged Satan about the integrity of the man Job. Satan didn't acknowledge anything for Job; Satan only found fault with Job. And Satan is the patron of all debating societies.

If debaters were to acknowledge any merits for what the other person has said, that would be the end of the debate. And that would be a disaster for them. And at any rate, no argument will change the minds of debaters.

It reminds me of an incident Mr. Herbert Armstrong recorded in his Autobiography. He was dealing with a young atheist who was also a communist. This incident is recorded in the section titled "Convincing Atheist Communists". Mr. Armstrong very methodically got the atheist to acknowledge that the existence of a creation requires a Creator. Finally, when Mr. Armstrong had backed the young atheist into a corner, the atheist responded as follows:

"He could take no more. "W -- W -- Well," he stammered pitifully, **"I won't worship God even if you DO make me admit He exists!"** This was a last attempt at defiance." (Autobiography of Herbert W Armstrong, Chapter 34)

That is always the case when people have to be argued into accepting something that is true. They in their own minds don't really accept the truth they are pressured to acknowledge.

Let's continue with Paul's instructions to Timothy.

In meekness **instructing those that oppose themselves**; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; (2 Timothy 2:25)

The Greek verb here translated as “instructing” (i.e. “paideuo”) has a far stronger meaning than “to instruct”. The Greek verb “paideuo” is connected to the Greek verb “paio”, which means “to smite, to strike, to sting”. And “paideuo” is used 13 times in the New Testament. In the KJV it is translated 6 times “**to chasten**”, 2 times “**to chastise**”, 2 times “**to learn**”, 2 times “**to teach**”, and only 1 time “**to instruct**”.

Now the words “in meekness” refer to the manner in which “the instruction” is delivered. So the chastisement or instruction should be very clear and firm, but the manner in which it is presented should be **non-threatening**, kind of like “speak softly but let them see that you carry a big stick”, i.e. that your explanation is biblically rock-solid and not at all “just your opinion”.

Some translations that recognize that the Greek verb is stronger than merely “instructing” those who oppose themselves include:

in meekness **correcting** them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God may give them repentance unto the knowledge of the truth, (2 Timothy 2:25 **ASV**, also **ERV**)

**correcting opponents** with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, (2 Timothy 2:25 **NRSV**)

in meekness **correcting the adversaries**; if peradventure God may grant unto them repentance into the perfect knowledge of the truth, (2 Timothy 2:25 **Godbey**)

in meekness **admonishing** those that oppose themselves; if haply God may give them repentance to attain the full knowledge of the truth, (2 Timothy 2:25 **Noyes**)

in meekness **setting right** those who oppose, if God perhaps may sometime give them repentance to acknowledgment of *the* truth, (2 Timothy 2:25 **Darby**)

So in this verse Paul was telling Timothy to **correct those who oppose the truth**, but to do so with a spirit of meekness. Paul was thinking of the slim chance that perhaps in some instances God might open their minds to understand the truth.

Let's come down to our age today.

## **THE VARIOUS CHURCH OF GOD GROUPS TODAY**

Since Mr. Armstrong's death in January 1986 the Church of God has split into numerous different organizations. A handful of those new organizations actually have well in excess of 1000 members. But then there are also dozens of organizations that have less than 1000 members each, with most of them in fact having well below 500 members.

There are now many different teachings and beliefs amongst the groups that all trace their origin back to the time of Mr. Armstrong's leadership. Initially most of the leaders in all these new groups had been ministers in the Worldwide Church of God while Mr. Armstrong was still alive. And then they became the leaders in their own organizations. And now almost 38 years after Mr. Armstrong's death the old guard is steadily dying off; and so some of these groups now have new leaders who did not have any position of leadership before Mr. Armstrong's death. It is somewhat like it was back in Egypt, when ... "there rose up a new king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph" (see Exodus 1:8). Today the influence of the dominant leaders of the past is quickly fading. A new group of leaders is arising.

So why is the Church of God today so greatly divided?

One of the reasons for all these divisions is the process that was started by Worldwide within days of Mr. Armstrong's death. The basic plan was to within a 10-year period eliminate all the true teachings that had been established in the Church by Mr. Armstrong, and to replace them with teachings that were accepted by mainstream "Christianity". The idea was to change God's Church into an "acceptable" Protestant denomination.

And sure enough, it took almost ten years to change all the teachings. And then large numbers of people said "enough is enough". And large numbers of people then left Worldwide, which with its diminished membership in time re-branded itself under a new name.

The problem was that by the time they left Worldwide, a very large number of people had accepted many of the changed doctrines that had been introduced during those first ten years after Mr. Armstrong's death. So when they then joined the various new church organizations, they brought some of the changed doctrines with them into those new organizations.

The result is that today all of the new organizations still observe the weekly Sabbath and the annual Feasts and Holy Days. But for many other teachings and beliefs some groups have accepted changes that other groups do not accept. And so we now find many differences in beliefs and practices amongst people who 40 years ago all shared a common understanding.

The use of the present Jewish calendar for determining the annual Feasts and Holy Days has become the focus of one such point of disagreement. But there are in fact also many other points of disagreement amongst all these church groups, though in discussions these other disagreements are not focused on nearly as often.

Here are some examples of other disagreements:

- 1) Some groups now believe that Jesus Christ was created by God the Father.
  - 2) Some people now believe that the Azazel goat represents Jesus Christ.
  - 3) Some people now believe that at times they should start their count towards Pentecost from the Sunday **after** the Seventh Day of Unleavened Bread.
  - 4) Some people now believe in placing the footwashing at the Passover **after** the bread and wine have been taken.
  - 5) Some people now believe they are already born again.
  - 6) Some people now observe their Passover at the end of the 14th day.
  - 7) Some groups accept the use of makeup and some groups don't accept makeup.
  - 8) Some groups now observe birthdays, and other groups don't.
  - 9) Some people still believe that God will take us to a place of safety for the duration of the great tribulation, and other people have rejected this teaching.
  - 10) Some people still believe in tithing, and some people don't believe in tithing.
- etc.

There are many other additional disagreements in beliefs and understanding. So how do all these differences affect our "**It Never Works If People Have To Be Argued Into Accepting The Truth**" statement?

Here is the point:

All the changes in understanding that people have made since Mr. Armstrong's death fall into two groups.

- 1) Some changes are due to **a growth in understanding**. This applies in those cases where our previous understanding was not correct, or incomplete. Some people have come to see that our previous understanding was not correct on a certain issue, and so they have made changes to reflect the new corrected understanding.
- 2) Other changes are the result of **rejecting a true and correct understanding** we had in the past, and replacing it with a teaching that is wrong before God. These changes amount to **replacing truth with error**. This is the process that was set in motion by Worldwide soon after Mr. Armstrong's death. This process provided the trigger for the mass exodus from Worldwide, and the establishment of new organizations. But this same process has continued unabated in many of the new organizations that were established.

Now all the people who have made some changes since Mr. Armstrong's death believe that their specific changes represent a growth in understanding. And none of them believe that the changes they have made represent a rejection of truth in favor of error. Rather, they feel that the error lies with those people who have not accepted the changes which they have accepted.

So how can we know the difference between these two groups of changed understanding?

The Apostle Paul provided the answer to this question to Timothy.

### **STUDY TO SHOW YOURSELF APPROVED**

Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that need not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.** (2 Timothy 2:15)

**It is a shame** for someone in God's Church to **wrongly** divide the word of truth, to misinterpret and to misapply the Scriptures. How can someone be a converted member of God's Church for two or three or four or more decades, and still "divide the word of truth" wrongly? It is incumbent on every person in God's Church to "rightly divide" the Bible. And to be able to do that, we have to seriously study the Scriptures, year after year after year. Superficial reading of the Bible just doesn't do it.

The difference between the two groups of changes that have been accepted since Mr. Armstrong's death is as follows:

1) Changes based on **growth in understanding** can all be substantiated by correct explanations of the Scriptures. Much of our wrong understanding in the past was based on incorrect translations of specific Bible verses. We accepted certain biblical statements as correct, and then we based our understanding on those mistranslated statements. Other wrong beliefs in the past were based on false assumptions that had never been carefully examined for correctness. We had simply accepted something that this world's "Christianity" accept as true.

Now, for example, once it is proved that **our understanding is based on a mistranslation** of the Hebrew or Greek text of the Bible, then it is inevitable that correcting that specific mistranslation demands that we also change our understanding which was based on that mistranslation. In this type of situation (e.g. mistranslating the Hebrew "heylel" into English as "lucifer") the proof is irrefutable. The proof is objective and impersonal. It does not depend on anyone's personal understanding or interpretation. The actual Hebrew or Greek text does not say what the mistranslation implies, and what we had until then accepted as true.

The proof is: here is the Hebrew or Greek word in question. Here is what this word actually means. And here is how it was mistranslated. Therefore we cannot accept any interpretation that is based on the mistranslation. To continue to accept an explanation that is based on a mistranslation, in order to hold fast to our traditions, implies a lack of integrity.

A vital component for changes that reflect a growth in understanding is that we explain what specific Scriptures **do** mean. Growth in understanding can never be based on what specific Scriptures don't mean. Real growth can never be based on "explaining away" specific Scriptures. Growth must be based on a positive view of the Scriptures, and not on a negative approach.

The point is: changes based on growth in understanding can readily be proved correct from the Bible. And this type of change is always good.

2) Changes that amount to **rejecting a truth** that has been well understood in the past, in favor of error, can never be supported from the Bible. Rather, such changes typically require people **"to explain away"** the obvious meaning of correctly translated Scriptures.

The Scriptures are deviously explained. And in these situations the proponents of these wrong changes invariably focus on trying to prove what the concerned Scriptures supposedly don't mean. **Their explanations never really care what the verses in question actually do mean.** Their entire efforts are aimed at supposedly proving what the relevant verses don't mean. Their entire approach to the Scriptures is negative.

So when we see this negative approach to explaining the Scriptures, trying to prove what the Scriptures supposedly don't mean, we should always smell a rat. Proving what a Scripture (supposedly) doesn't mean is not proof for anything! Disproving one thing is in itself never proof for something else. That "something else" still needs to be proved in its own right.

The way to establish that a change amounts to rejecting truth in favor of error is to examine the Scriptures that support the truth. Have they been correctly understood in the past? Are we looking at correctly translated biblical statements? What Scriptures supposedly support the error that is being introduced? Are those verses explained correctly, or are they mis-explained, in an attempt to justify the change that has been made?

The point is: changes away from a correct understanding to something that is not correct can easily be exposed by examining all the relevant Scriptures. And this type of change is always very bad. And these are the changes that apply to the topic we are discussing in this article.

## **THE REAL DANGER**

People can change their beliefs from one wrong teaching to another wrong teaching, and then to still another wrong teaching, without significant consequences for these changes they have accepted. In other words, it makes no significant difference whether people spend their whole lives with one set of wrong religious beliefs, or whether in their lifetime they cycle through half a dozen different sets of wrong beliefs. From a godly perspective there are no significant differences in character between people in these two situations.

They were wrong to start with, and that situation never changed for them throughout their lives. At the

end of their lives they still reject God's truth, whether they only accepted one set of wrong beliefs, or whether they accepted a number of different sets of wrong beliefs. Typically all these people will be in the second resurrection.

But it is **a totally different matter** when someone comes into God's Church, learns the truth with an open mind, and then years later rejects some of the truth he had learned, in favor of accepting a belief that can be proved to be false.

When this person had come into God's Church, the person had learned the truth of God on many different subjects. The person's mind had recognized and accepted those truths. His mind had been "enlightened". If this person at a later time then rejects any truth that he had previously accepted, and instead accepts a belief that is false, then this amounts to **going back into error**.

This action has a virtually irreversible negative effect on their character. This change makes this person unreliable before God. God cannot trust such a person. And once a person with whom God has been working demonstrates that he cannot be trusted, there is nothing else that can be done for that person. Such people have in effect "left their first love". And that is why Satan works so hard at trying to persuade some of God's people to reject a truth, any truth, that they had previously understood and accepted.

We need to recognize that for such a person **it never works if we then try to argue them into again accepting a truth they used to believe in the past**. They have gone past the point of no return. And all arguments will be in vain.

This is an extremely dangerous situation!

And it is a situation that the Apostle Paul explained in the Book of Hebrews. It is explained in one long sentence, which actually covers three whole verses. Here is Paul's statement.

For **it is impossible** for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the holy spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, **to renew them again** unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *Him* to an open shame. (Hebrews 6:4-6)

Paul is speaking about a very specific and limited group of people. About this specific group of people Paul makes an absolute statement. For this group of people Paul says: **it is impossible to renew them again!**

So how does Paul identify the specific group of people he had in mind? Paul is speaking about people who ...



- 1) Had been enlightened in the past. This statement means that these people had actually received some degree of understanding from God.
- 2) Had tasted the heavenly gift. This means that they had understood that God is building the Family of God, and they had been offered a part in that Family.
- 3) Had been made partakers of God's holy spirit. This means that they had received at least one talent of God's holy spirit (see Matthew 25:14-15), and they had become accountable for that talent.
- 4) Had tasted the good word of God. This means that they had come to have a certain understanding of God's plan and God's purposes.
- 5) (Had tasted) the powers of the world to come. This means that they had understood what God has planned for the future, with Jesus Christ ruling as King of kings and Lord of lords.

**These five statements exclude tares!** Tares who eventually (and thankfully!) leave God's Church are not included in these statements. These five statements identify people who had received at least one talent from God. Paul's statements apply to people who really had been a part of God's true Church, but then at some point they left God's Church.

So having very clearly identified the specific group of people Paul had in mind, what condition is Paul referring to for this group?

"If they shall fall away"!

So for people who fall away, what does Paul say?

**Paul is saying that if people who had really been a part of God's Church fall away, then they can never come back into God's Church.**

Note! Paul is not speaking about people who are put out of the Church for various reasons. Such people can certainly repent and come back into God's Church. Paul is not speaking about people who are put out of God's Church.

No, Paul is speaking about **people who "fall away"**. That is a completely different issue from being put out of God's Church. These people initiate their own departures themselves.

### **HOW DO PEOPLE "FALL AWAY"?**

The Greek verb here translated as “fall away” is “parapesontas”, a form of “parapipto”. This Greek verb “parapipto” literally refers to **“falling in our way, as a result of taking a false step”**. This is not the same as “stumbling” due to hitting some unexpected stumbling block.

To make this clear:

When we **“stumble”**, then that is due to encountering some **unexpected obstacle**. We were going along, and then were confronted by an unanticipated challenge. This caused us to stumble. In New Testament Greek this process is described by verbs like “ptaio” and “proskopto”. But this process of being challenged by unexpected obstacles is **not** what Paul is speaking about in Hebrews 6:4-6. And Paul didn’t use either of these two Greek verbs.

On the other hand, when we **“fall away”**, then that is not due to any obstacle facing us. Falling away is due to us **knowingly taking a false step**. This involves us having in our own minds decided to take that false step. Falling away refers to having made **a calculated decision**, not to dealing with unexpected problems. And this is the process Paul is speaking about in Hebrews 6:4-6.

So how can people “knowingly take a false step”? What does that look like in practical terms?

This refers to **people who already know the right way to take**, and they are actively walking along on that right way. They are heading towards the right destination. As they are walking along the right way, they see a path leading off to one side. Someone suggests to them that this path is a better way to get to their destination.

They look at it, think about, and then decide to take that path. Nobody is pushing them onto that path. They themselves decide to take it. So they step onto that path. In so doing they have taken “a false step”, and the result will be that they will fall. They will fall because that path leads to destruction. And in the past 30+ years many people have voluntarily and deliberately taken such wrong paths. They didn’t stumble. No, they chose to go a different way.

In actual practice this looks as follows. Here is the process:

People come into God’s Church. They have learned about the laws of God. They understand those laws. They also understand many aspects of God’s plan of salvation for mankind. They correctly understand the true doctrines of the Church, which are explained and taught at services and Bible Studies, and in the Church’s literature. They are “walking along” with this knowledge and understanding. God has opened their minds to understanding the truth of God. And they have rejected the false teachings of the world’s churches.

Then someone presents to them an explanation that rejects one of the true doctrines they had learned and accepted when they came into God’s Church. The idea presented to them creates a completely different picture from what they have believed since coming into the Church of God. The new explanation explains certain Scriptures differently, or it draws different deductions from certain verses,

deductions they had never considered before.

**This new picture appeals to them.** They like it. And they don't evaluate the claims made for this new picture as rigorously as they should. They accept certain unproved assumptions, which sound plausible to them.

**What they don't do** is: they don't carefully examine all the reasons why they had accepted the doctrine or belief in the first place. They don't carefully examine all the applicable Scriptures, to see why those Scriptures supposedly should no longer apply for the old explanation of this specific doctrine or belief. No, the new explanation for some or other biblical verses appeals to them.

So after comparing the old doctrine with the new doctrine intended to replace the old one, they decide to accept the new teaching, and to reject the old teaching. The fact that the new teaching relies on negative arguments about what specific verses supposedly don't mean is not significant to them. The fact that other Scriptures contradict this new belief also means nothing to them.

They decide to accept this new doctrine. They weren't pressured into accepting the new teaching. No, they accepted the new ideas voluntarily. In the process they have rejected a truth they used to understand.

**They have fallen away from something they used to understand correctly!**

Whenever this is the case for someone, then, in Paul's words, it is impossible to renew them again. Nothing will get them to go back to accepting the correct teaching they had originally believed.

**Switching from accepting truth to accepting a heresy** in the place of truth **is an irreversible process**. Or as I have been saying, **it never works** if we try to get someone to again accept a truth they used to believe. They have rejected that truth, and that rejection has done something irreversible to their minds.

When people are in this specific situation, then there is no way in which we can help them. They have wilfully rejected a truth, any truth, and that wilful rejection has affected their character in a very negative way.

That is a very sad thing to witness. It is like watching someone slowly sinking into quicksand, and being utterly unable to help that person in any way. All we can do is helplessly watch that person disappear under the quicksand. It is extremely sad.

The reality is that Christianity never works if people have to be argued into accepting the truth of God. People who have never known God's truth, and who have never been a part of God's Church, cannot be argued into understanding God's truth, and therefore we should not even try to argue with them. It has not been given to them to understand. They will be in the second resurrection.

And people who have known and understood the truth of God, and then rejected some facet of that truth

likewise can never be argued into again accepting the truth they have knowingly rejected. God had given them understanding, but **they have rejected some of that understanding**. For these people the Apostle Paul says “it is impossible to renew them again”, which means that these people are heading towards the lake of fire. They are just like politicians, who will never acknowledge the flaws in their own positions ... though I certainly do not mean to imply that politicians are heading towards the lake of fire.

Keep these points in mind if you ever talk religion with other people.

Frank W Nelte