

The Sleight of Hand

Fred R. Coulter—May 6, 1989

Many of the people that meet have come out of various churches, but most predominately out of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG). That being the case, there is long and laboring situation that people go through concerning WCG and really leaves and impact upon people.

- Did the WCG leave an impact with you?
- Did it impact your life, whether for good or bad?

It still impacted your life!

In connection with that, I couldn't figure out exactly what I could entitle this message. The first title I wrote down was *The Sleight of Hand*. The second title I wrote down was *What Do You Think of When You Think of a Church of God?*

I want to cover some very basic things, because what happens to people in WCG—which also happened to us—is very, very subtle and very, very damaging. It leaves people with wounds upon their souls, unfortunately!

How does Jesus or God view the Church of God? All of the Scriptures that I am going to cover have been covered as points of authority in the WCG.

Matthew 16:18: And I say also to you that you are Peter; but upon this Rock **I will build My Church...**—*the Rock refers to Christ.*

The ones who are Jesus' are called by Jesus: **My sheep! My brethren!** I want to emphasize that Jesus says, *My/Mine!*

"...and *the gates of **the grave*** shall not prevail against it" (v 18)—Greek: 'hades.' In other words, it would not die out.

We were all told, which we were dutifully told in WCG that this means that the Church belongs to Christ, and that Christ is the Head of the Church. That's correct; we all have that!

Matt. 28:10-20 talks about baptism, which is the key initiation being baptized into Christ.

Matthew 28:19: "Therefore, go *and* make disciples in all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, *even* until the completion of the age.' Amen."

The Church Age will come to a close. It closes as the first resurrection. Then we start the Kingdom Age, after the seven last plagues. That's when the Kingdom Age starts.

Acts 2:38: "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for *the* remission of sins, and you yourselves shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

Who did the Holy Spirit come from? *From God the Father!*

We're told also that the Church is the Bride of Christ and that the Church is the mother of us all; also that is the Body of Christ. What are we told about this Body? *All the churches in the world cannot be the Body of Christ!* We were told that in WCG. Generally that is a true statement! That's why I first named this message *The Sleight of Hand*.

1-Corinthians 12:12: "For even as the body is one and has many members, yet, all the members of the one body, though many, are one body; **so also is Christ.** For indeed, **by one Spirit...** [from God the Father] ...we were all baptized **into one Body**—whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or free—and **we were all made to drink into one Spirit**" (vs 12-13).

So far, so good! We are told that the Church of God is a spiritual organization; isn't that what we were told? Likened to the Body of Christ and Christ is the Head of the Church. *So far, so good!*

When a person is baptized, and this is the way that they're baptized, whatever your name is, because you have repented of your sins, which are the transgressions of God's Holy, righteous and perfect Law, and because you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master, and High Priest in heaven right now and your soon coming King in the World Tomorrow; listen carefully:

I baptize you, not into any sect or denomination of this world, (some say 'not any organization of men'); but in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit for the remission of your sins. Amen.' *Then water comes over all your body.*

Then you're raised out of that watery grave, have hands laid on you and prayed over with the laying on of hands, for the receipt of the Holy Spirit. Fine and good!

- Now what happened?
- What happens with this sleight of hand?

Then we are introduced to:

- the Government of God *the first sleight of hand!*

- Church authority, *the second sleight of hand!*

And we were told that ministers have rule over your lives, then the rule becomes more and more and more.

Then what else happened and why is it so hard for people to get their lives adjusted if they leave the WCG? I've mentioned this before, but I never went through it step-by-step this way. We were originally told that the Church is a spiritual organism, ***that there can even be people sitting in the WCG without the Spirit of God and they're not a part of God's Church!***

So, even though you're sitting there in the congregation of the WCG ***you must have the Holy Spirit*** and ***then*** you are in the Church of God. Then we're introduced to church government, that has rule over us! Then we found out that there was an apostle, then *the* apostle, and the Government of God meant ***the ministry!*** Why is that a sleight of hand? *They put things for their own use!*

The ministry is not the Government of God!

They are supposed to be the servants of the people. They are not the Government of God. What is the Government of God? ***The rule of God in our own lives, but it's also going to be the rule of Christ through the Kingdom of God on the earth!***

What did they take to themselves, which then devastated so many people? Someone ask me how many people did I think left WCG, ministers and members? I said that I would make a guess, but probably the same number that are there now (1989).

{note that WCG has since disintegrated and those left changed to Protestantism and Sunday-keeping}

But that becomes very devastating, because what do they take to themselves when they say that? *They take God's authority to themselves, so therefore, with that very act they supplant God!*

Think about it! They may not really fully comprehend what they are doing. When you do that, what do you take advantage of that each individual has done for God. What is it that each one of you have said to God yourself? ***He will rule our life!*** In other words, ***you are dedicated to God!***

The next ***sleight of hand*** is transferring that love, loyalty and faith that we exhibit and give to God to then transfer that to men. That's the next ***sleight of hand!***

We've covered Luke 22 before, but not in the same concept.

Luke 22:24: "And there was also an argument among them, *even* this: which of them

should be considered *the* greatest. And He said to them, 'The kings of the nations lord over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors'" (vs 24-25).

Isn't that what the ministers were called as they leveraged this authority over you? What happens? ***Christ does not want the love and dedication, and the faith and loyalty that you give to God and Christ leveraged to a man!***

- Why does God not want that leveraged to another man? *Because they worship the man and it takes God's place!*
- When it takes God's place what happens? *You serve man and become a pope!*

But it's even much more fundamental than that!

- Didn't we have authority exercised over us, and we were told that these are our benefactors? *That's what it's so devastating to the people who have committed themselves to God to have this leveraged suffering into the hands of man to be used!*

There are two things:

1. you look to a man instead of God
2. they can't forgive sin

There's something even much more fundamental than that is the reason why God does not want that done, and why that becomes a tremendous sin against the people and against God: *'Have no other gods before Me!'*

He's a jealous God, just like the jealousy of a marriage; only much more so! What does God want from you to Him?

Mark 12:30: "“And you shall love *the* Lord your God with **all** your heart, and with **all** your soul... [this is the most basic Scripture of all] ...and with **all** your mind, and with **all** your strength.; **This is the first commandment.**”

When a human being leverages that to another human being, they are causing you to love God less, because they have diverted what belongs to God to themselves! It never really crystallized in my mind that way until having made a trip back East.

- the vanity of the ministers get involved
- their authority that is exercised upon people
- they assume to themselves other thing

Then let's take this another step further: Once that is done, and you accept that, you let someone take part of your Mark 12:30 away from God and take it to themselves, what happens?

God does not want any authority in His

salvation for you, **but His**, because Christ died for you! He doesn't want anything interfering with that love, nothing—period! When you give that to men, what happens when men get it? They organize it and this became very clear at my Century 21 franchise! It was almost like a ministerial conference that I had attended, believe it or not!

We have all of you here and then the region, then the national, then the international, which is all fine for a corporation and I was sitting there in the middle of it and all of it became crystal clear! Through the use of the organization of a modern corporation they have taken to that corporation the prerogative and loyalty and love of God that should go to God. Hence they become corrupt, because God is not going to let anyone take that from Him without some kind of penalty somewhere.

What happens if a person says that you're only one preaching the Truth in the world?

- Oh yes, I discovered that in 1927 in a library when I was studying for six months! *Not true!*
- The Gospel has not been preached for 1900 years! *Not true!*
- There is only one church on the face of the earth! *A true statement!*
- This Worldwide Church of God is *the* Church of God. *False statement!*

It may be a Church of God, but not the Church of God!

- If you leave this Church you leave God! *A true statement* **IF** you leave the Church of the God, hence you leave God the Father and Christ.

However, again, the prerogative of God has been leveraged to the corporation! *Subtle, isn't it?*

- If you leave the Worldwide Church of God you have left God!

That's why I couldn't figure out if I should name this message *Sleight of Hand* **or** *When You Think of a Church, What Do You Think Of?*

That's where they have the fear of the Church **replacing the fear and love of God**, and you have an idol called *a corporation!* It dawned on me sitting there and listening to the Century 21 seminars. I said to myself, 'I have heard this before for a corporation, for a business to do a business, *that's fine for corporate business things!*

Even though they had meetings on Sabbath, I did not go, because that was not their day to make me come and sit there. **It's God's Day!** Unfortunately, I was sick and I still didn't go! And I won't!

Can you see what happens when they leverage that to an organization? *People are fearful!* With the exercising of authority over you they take away your freedom of thought. Now what is said when you have this authority? **You should not criticize the ministry even if it is wrong!**

You're only duty is to pray and pay! If you do not pay, thou shalt not pray (I add a little sarcastically)!

See how all of that gets built up in there? When we bring and offering or tithe to God, should it not be from the heart, though God says to bring it?

That's why since we have been with our little group, I say nothing about anything concerning that because we have been so merchandized over it in the past ad nauseam!

If it were not for the brethren who have helped me, my family would not still be intact and we would not even be in California. We would have been long gone some place else.

I think God is beginning to move us in that direction now where I can have an independent income and I can say I no longer need help but let's use it for something else. I can begin to see that day coming. I hope that it will and we can use it for all kinds of other things that we need to do. In the meantime it has sustained our family and has been absolutely unbelievable the way that God has intervened to make things work and stretch, and get it to the point where it needs to be. *Thank every one of you on that and all the part that you have done!*

I know that you view it as giving it to God, and I understand that, because God commands it. I've tried to use everything in a way that would be proper and had to use almost all of it to sustain our flesh in the way that the world is.

But when it gets to the point that all of these things are leveraged, and they become the focal point of what is being done, they take to themselves the prerogative of God!

Herbert Armstrong controlled everything, that if they said anything against Headquarters or anything against the ministers or of 'the government of God' then you were saying it against God. *That absolutely unequivocally proves that they put themselves in God's place!*

- Is any man above criticism? *No!*
- Should there have to be all kinds of criticism to the minister?
- Can there be carnal criticism of the ministry?
- Can there be just nit-picking against the ministry?

Sure! I've suffered all of that! I've had that! I've had people land on me for things that should not have been, when I wasn't sinning.

- What if a minister sins?
- Is that to just go on and on and nothing ever taken care of? *Of course not!*

That is absolutely proves how they really did set themselves at that level. 'If you criticize us, you're criticizing God, because God has done this.' **When God has not done it!**

But this is what holds the people in Worldwide Church of God in such ***absolute fear!*** You fear the minister, you fear leaving 'the' Church, and you can't trust yourself and you can't trust God!

One lady says that when she left WCG some would call her on the phone and say 'you have lost salvation. If you're going to be in the Kingdom of God you're going to go through the Tribulation.'

Isn't that why people are called to the WCG? *Think very carefully, because that is also subtle!*

God is doing the calling for those who truly repent and understand the Truth and want to love God and keep His commandments, want salvation.

- What is the *main appeal* that is given to anybody? *The Tribulation!*
- What is one of the major articles? *There Is a Way of Escape!* That's true, there is a way of escape!
- Do people want to save their own skins? *Yes!*

So, when you are told there is a way of escape; that it's going to be just like Lebanon and no one is going to make it!

- Do you want to escape? *Sure you want to escape!*

You come into the Church and one of the first sermons that really captures your imagination is: *Pray that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things* (Luke 21), and then *the minister gives a detailed sermon on a place of safety.*

That place of safety will be in Petra! It may be at Petra, but is anyone going to get there ***that God doesn't want there? No!***

So, if it is Petra, that's fine, I won't argue with that. But what is the next sleight of hand that takes place? *If you leave this corporate structure you are not going to escape!* Another thing was that Mr. Armstrong is negotiating to buy 747s so we can fly over to Jordan, and then ride the camels to Petra. We all sat there and said, 'Yeah!'

Now there's another hook into you! See how subtly these things took place. Another way to solve your financial problems is to tithe—1st, 2nd & 3rd and everything attached to it. They didn't understand tithing. That does not balance with the statement that says, 'you're going to suffer for Christ.'

So, in a sense the way that was preached was to the effect that if you tithe to the Church and gave abundance, you could 'buy salvation'! They didn't put in those words, but if you didn't tithe and you didn't give all you could you sure wouldn't be there!

We can sit and kind of laugh at now, but there are some people who are very, very locked into it, and so much so that they are fearful. How dangerous did this situation get? *Gerald Waterhouse said—I heard it on tape, and after three hours of brow-beating, maybe four—and if you nodded your head down you would be corrected from the staged.*

I remember when Waterhouse came out to Boise, Idaho. It was a hot summer evening with no air-conditioning. We were meeting in the YMCA and the windows were opened. He's going along, preaching along and everything and there was a screech of tires and smash, a wreck right outside the window.

What is the natural reaction going to be? Gasp and turn your head! Waterhouse said:

How dare you! Don't you think this is more important than that wreck out there? You listen to what I have to say; don't any of you look out there!

He had no concern! Maybe someone was hurt and maybe we could have gone out and helped them! Everyone was fearful, eyes wide opened and he told the brethren:

With all this church trouble we've been having, I want to tell you that Mr. Armstrong may be 95% wrong and you be 95% right, but God is going uphold Mr. Armstrong and not you!

What does that do to Truth? *Destroys it! Right out the window!* So, you see the problems when these subtleties are leveraged; very, very clever! So subtle that you don't even know. Then people wonder...

They have to love God and they better attend church and if they don't they'll get a phone call, 'Where have you been and what are you doing?' And they've been activitized that they had activities every day. Sports on Sunday, Bible study on Wednesday, Sabbath services and then they had Spokesman's Club one day of the week and something else—seven days a week, the whole round and round. I imagine that was the same with

you, especially if you were a deacon or something then you had all kinds of meetings to attend to.

If you didn't attend church there was a little attendance thing secretly taken, sometimes not so secretly, to know whether you were there or not. Then people get all fearful!

Then they end up being in the Church of God, which is supposed to be held together. How is the Church of God supposed to be held together? ***By love! Being knit together in love! But they were held together by authority and fear in the Church of God!***

Then one day it dawns on you: 'Why am I so miserable in this thing, God?' *Because they left off the Love of God and they violated the very first commandment to begin with! So subtly!*

Therefore I can now answer the question. Remember that I made the statement: If we were to organize, I don't know how we would organize? I think I can answer that now:

Whatever the organization structure needs to be, to do the physical parts of whatever needs to be done, in doing whatever we need to do—to find a room, a hall, print, distribute, mail, whatever—***the organization should never take away from the love of God!***

It should ***never*** be structured so that you leverage the prerogatives of God to the corporation or to an individual.

Suppose you have a department where someone needs to be proficient in doing something, if they are not proficient in doing it, they should be released from that position and do not put it on a 'do or die' situation.

After all you're working here and God has chosen you for this and you better do it. Then they finally had a problem at Ambassador College, that now not everyone that went there was taken into the work or ministry. Now you were a 'dirty dog' and outcast because that had been so pounded into everybody's mind.

Then you saw some of these poor graduates come out from Pasadena and they looked like 'clipped dogs.' I mean people with good ability, because it was put on entirely the wrong level.

They put it on the level of salvation and God, when it may have just been on the level of doing a job. Entirely different! So, whatever the organization needs to be is to get everything done that needs to be done, but ***never supplant the love of God!***

That much I now know, and it has really crystallized in my mind that is what needs to be.

Now let's go to the example of Biblical Church of God. When we went through and setup that constitution and bylaws, we signed our 'death warrant'—a very rapid one—because we didn't learn anything out of WCG. We didn't learn this lesson that's coming on WCG. So, it was rather short term because we didn't learn that.

We started out loving God and doing all that we should, but when we organized to the point that the corporation and the structure of it took away from loving and serving God! It went down the tubes very rapidly! Even much more so than WCG, because it was smaller.

But also the men on the committees, instead of having a dictatorship by one, it was a dictatorship by committee and they say in the seat of God and they made the judgments; not only of what they considered right and wrong, but on ***whether*** your heart was right with God or not.

- Who know whose heart is right with God? *God does!*
- How would you like it if you repented your insides totally out—your mind, your heart and everything—and said that 'I repent for my very existence and then be told that 'we do not accept that'?

Talk about sitting in the seat of God! No way! We were doomed for destruction the day that we did that! Absolutely!

How did it get started that way? *I think it is because as human beings we, instead of seeking what we just covered—and look how long it's been since the lesson has been truly learned in a clear, definitive way—is that since there were problems in WCG the problem was structure!* So, if we change the structure we will eliminate the problem. However, ***structure in an organization does not change human nature!***

That's the biggest problem! You can change the problems in WCG by changing to another structure! The only way you can solve the problems of WCG is to get back to the first commandment of loving God and then structure everything to that.

Comment was made that *as long as you're loving God in the same way that Herbert Armstrong followed God things went along the way they should have.*

But it became a 'movement,' and when you have a 'movement' then you are doing a work ***for*** God rather than God having ***you doing a work for Him!***

Same way in Biblical CoG; that became a movement inasmuch as we were wanting for God rather than letting God show us what the work

should be that we should have been doing. We used our own devices and thoughts, so therefore, it was doomed to destruction.

I'm thankful that God did not destroy us perfectly and thank you for the mercy of God that we can see this. But it is true that when you have a 'movement' then you have a monument. When you have a monument, you chisel it in stone.

I think now we have the first crystal clear route as to what God wants us to do. Don't create anything of your own devising that keeps people from loving God. That is the key! Therefore, everything can be structured in whatever task that needs to be done, but then don't make the task a matter of salvation.

- Is typing a matter of salvation? *No!*
- Is writing a matter of salvation? *No!*
- Is where you live a matter of salvation? *No!*
- Is what your job is a matter of salvation? *No, as long as you're loving God and keeping His commandments!*

What if you're a garbage man, so what? *Maybe they have more peace of mind than anybody!* They get used to the smell and the dirt, see it and get on the back of their truck and throw away everybody else's garbage.

It's not a matter of them making the job as a part of salvation. That's what happened in the Churches; they make the job a part of your salvation. It isn't! and they incorporate that into the structure!

Now there are many people coming out of WCG and they need someone who understands what's going on and can help them.

(inaudible and also a break in audio)

As we were sitting talking a comment was made that God had to take us out of WCG so we could come to this to understand about loving God. Very interesting comment!

In that comment I think that's what started the chain of thought that led to what we covered here today. What a shame that the WCG has got itself in such a mess that in order for someone to learn the love of God they must come into the WCG and out of the WCG to meet with brethren who truly love each other and love God.

- *What a shame!*
- *What a waste of all that is there!*

When it comes down to that, you can bring them up so far, but we are not to stay babes! We are to grow up into Christ!

Eph. 4—this is what the Church is to do and become:

Ephesians 4:11: And He gave some as apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers.”

Though I have on my stationary *pastor*, I do not consider myself that I want to take any title above pastor, and I'm not taking as far as taking a title or anything like that. I don't think pastor as a title; I think it defines what is being done. As far as anything I can do, I would say that I consider myself *a teacher!*

I'm certainly not going to appoint myself as an apostle or prophet or evangelist. If these things are functions to be done, then that puts it in a little bit very different light.

Verse 12: **“For the perfecting of the saints...”**—*to make the disciple as the teacher! To teach them for God!*

“...for the work of the ministry... [for the service] ...**for the edifying...** [up-building in love] ...**of the Body of Christ until we all...** [apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers *and brethren*] ...**come into the unity of the faith...** [which comes from God] ...**and of the knowledge of the Son of God...**” (vs 12-13).

When you take prerogative of God to human beings, you destroy the knowledge of the Son of God. Can you possibly fully comprehend that the sacrifice and life of Christ is more than we can comprehend. I think we comprehend a great deal of it, but if we take these prerogatives that belong to God and give them to a man, how can we come to the knowledge of the Son of God? You cannot do that! That is a full living powerful statement.

“...unto a perfect man... [a mature Christian] ...**unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**” (v 13).

That is a huge job! You can't do that when you leverage these things to human beings, to the authority of a church or whatever.

Verse 14: “So that we no longer be children, tossed and carried about...”

Isn't that what happened in WCG; they're tossed to and fro *by the authority* in the Church. Maybe not with every wind of doctrine, but by the *authority* of the Church.

“...with every wind of doctrine by **the sleight of men in cunning craftiness...** [where they wait to deceive] ...with a view to the systematizing of the error.”

Isn't that something that the deception is so clever and slight that those doing it don't even know

that they are doing it. That's something!

Verse 15: "But holding the Truth in love, may in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, *even* Christ from Whom all the Body, fitly framed and compacted together by *that which* every joint supplies, according to *its* inner working in the measure of each individual part, **is making the increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love**" (vs 15-16).

That's what the Church needs to be structured to! The way that is structured is by not allowing the structure of administration to interfere with the first commandment of ***loving God with all your heart, mind, soul, and being, so you can come to this full knowledge and the measure and stature of Christ!***

That really helps clarify what happens to people when they are in a church ***and the leaders leverage to themselves the prerogatives of God!***

Scriptures from *The Holy Bible in Its Original Order, A Faithful Version*

Scriptural References:

- 1) Matthew 16:18
- 2) Acts 2:38
- 3) 1-Corinthians 12:12-13
- 4) Luke 22:24-25
- 5) Mark 12:30
- 6) Ephesians 4:11-16

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Matthew 28:10-20
- Luke 21

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