

# No gods Before Me

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung 4/25/2015

*Thou shalt have no other gods before me* (Exodus 20:3). That is where the title comes from. **That is the first of the Ten Commandments.**

Many of us have been part of the Church of God for many years.

Specific Purpose Statement: I want to talk about a problem in the church that has been getting worse for a long time.

Every day we are faced with making decisions of “right” or “wrong.” How can we be sure that we are pleasing in God’s sight?

When we live by God’s rule – defined by His Law and Commandments – we can be sure that we are acting on His behalf. However, anytime we **infringe** upon any of God’s laws, statutes, judgments or His perfect way, we have stepped away from His sanction. We are no longer acting on His behalf; no matter how important the matter, or how highly regarded we might think we are.

There has been a great deal of confusion over the issue of who is the **head of the Church of God.**

The difficulty arises primarily because of a misuse of the word, "**church.**"

The Church of God is not a **physical** organization – but a **spiritual** entity, the called out body of true believers – the Body of Christ. Corporate organizations are ruled by men, whereas the Church of God answers directly to Jesus Christ - the head of the Church.

In the second half of the last century, the Gospel message went to the world with great power. Many people were converted and learned the true doctrines of Jesus Christ.

But, at the same time, many brethren suffered to one degree or another from the **heavy hand** of oppression because of wrong leadership.

When the apostasy came after the death of Herbert W. Armstrong, many brethren had great difficulty deciding what to do. Over half of the people made the mistake of remaining loyal to the Worldwide Church of God organization – rather than loyal to the True God.

They had learned to be **loyal to men** and loyal to their organization. As a tragic result, they accepted its heresies, and discarded their devotion to God and His truth. They did not know how to remain faithful to God and His Word.

Through God’s mercy, many of us escaped – for a time... Have we not learned our lesson?

Some corporate church organizations have fallen back into the same idolatrous trap of putting loyalty to men and organizations ahead of **loyalty to God.**

The answer is **not** to love an organization, but to love God and one another.

1 John 3:14 *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death...*

1 John 3:16 *Hereby perceive we the love of God."*

We have had a church culture that has basically said: “**It is okay** for a minister to go outside the bounds of normalcy – because after all – he is in charge and he has the authority to take extraordinary measures.

We have transitioned from the Old Testament Church in the wilderness – to the New Testament Christian Church of God. There are some really big differences. For example:

In the Old Testament there was a priesthood that stood **between** Israel and God.

That was the office of the priest. But it is not that way today:

In the New Testament, the priesthood was replaced by the office of Jesus Christ – our High Priest.

Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

Hebrews 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore **come boldly unto the throne of grace**, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

“Come boldly unto the throne of grace” means into God’s **presence**. We have been reconciled to the Father.

Again, Jesus is our **mediator**, our helper, our intercessor and He reconciled us **directly** to God the Father – with no go betweens. It is before God that we stand or fall – **not** before any man.

Brethren, a church minister is different from a priest. The Catholics have priests. He is an “*alter dei*” – meaning ‘another god’ – he stands **in place of God** - between man and God.

We have heard so much about church government – many are confused.

We all, ostensibly, -- supposedly, want to obey God.

The problem arises when we do not know **who** it is – that **is speaking** for God. We should never rest assured in that some man or group is doing our thinking for us.

Many brethren have suffered abuse or neglect at the hand of a hireling minister causing them to be less inclined to trust any other minister.

Brethren were taught incorrectly that the minister could rule over their lives and that if he made a mistake – it really **was not** a mistake because God would set it right. Brethren, it does not work that way.

One minister told me that he could do **whatever he wanted**, because he was the Pastor. He had learned a very wrong concept.

Ministers made decisions in families’ lives that should only have been made by the head of the family – the head of the household.

Too many ministers taught that their decisions, whether good or bad, were **sanctioned** by God's Himself because of the authority invested in them.

Brethren, please understand this: No minister is ever above God's law. Whenever a minister sins, he act on his own. He does not have God's approval. His counsel will not be blessed automatically by God.

God's administration of His Law, which begins with God the Father and flows down through Jesus Christ, extends to every member of the entire body of the Church of God – but not **through** any minister.

Not even if that minister claims to have received the baton, or the mantle of authority, and subsequently thinks that he rules over the brethren of the Church in God's stead.

Many brethren have been led to believe that organizational "Church Government" is merely an extension of "God's Government," exercised and administered by the ministry. That is not the case. No man is ever permitted to change or alter God's counsel.

In the past, there have been many ministers who abused the brethren. Some brethren are still **hurt**, angry, bitter, and resentful at the Church of God because of the treatment they and their families suffered at the hands of harsh ministers. Those ministers were hard taskmasters who demanded obedience to themselves.

Brethren were taught that their salvation was at stake if they did not yield to every whim of the Pastor, because he represented God on earth. That, too, was a false teaching.

Other fellow ministers tacitly approved of, and even supported that ungodly ministerial behavior by turning a **blind eye** to the evil that was being perpetrated on innocent brethren.

Those men who close their eyes to the abuse are more than willing to condone sin and corruption on a ministerial level.

They are **guilty of iniquity**. The Bible states that in Leviticus 5:1.

Leviticus 5:1 And if a soul [anyone] sins, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen **or known** of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his **iniquity**.

Violate this principle of God, and you are just as guilty as the perpetrator in God's eyes.

We have got to get back to the Truth of God. There is **no man** between a Church member and Jesus Christ. Our loyalty is to Jesus Christ and His Father – anything less constitutes **idolatry**. Jesus Christ **alone** is our advocate...

1 John 2:1 We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Jesus Christ **alone** is our mediator...

1 Timothy 2:5 There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Recently, I heard an evangelist in one of the big groups say that you **need** a man between you and Jesus Christ – and that man **is** – and he named the headman of his corporate church organization – the Pastor General, Leading evangelist, Apostle, presiding evangelist or whatever title they ascribe to him...

The sad thing is that not another minister in his entire organization ever called the evangelist's attention to the fact that that was **incorrect**. The man was directly teaching **idolatry** – a violation of the First Commandment. And it did not bother anyone.

Exodus 20:3 *Thou shalt have no other gods [little 'g'] before me.*

“gods” in Exodus 20 is *Elohim* - and here it is correctly **not** capitalized because it refers to lesser gods – not only graven idols (that is the next commandment) but here “gods” refer to **officials**, magistrates, judges, important men as well...

Important men cannot step into God’s place – that too is idolatry – putting someone ahead of our True God.

That is the rule of God in our lives as His Spirit leads us. (Romans 8:14).

Romans 8:14 For as many as **are led** by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Nothing, or no one can interject themselves into that relationship between us and God.

**Is** there a proper place for the ministry of Jesus Christ? The answer is an unequivocal, Yes!

The apostle Paul said that the work of a minister in the Church is to **serve** the brethren in Godly love and to feed, nourish, protect, and care for the flock of God. [Not be waited on hand and foot as some ministers like to enjoy.]

The very last time that Paul saw the elders of Ephesus, he admonished them concerning their responsibility to faithfully serve God and the brethren.

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers [guardians], to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.

There is a need for ministers of Jesus Christ, and organizations, that preach and **teach** the Truth... to **counsel** according to the word of God... to **marry**... to **bury**... to **visit** the sick and to **anoint** with oil... to facilitate the ministry of **reconciliation**... to return those who have gone astray... for the **laying** on of hands, and **baptizing** those whom God calls... and there are Feasts to **administer**, **babies** to bless, and the Gospel to **warn** the world, etc.

The apostle Peter warned the ministers **not** to use coercion or constraint in their teaching and care of the flock. (1 Peter 5:2)

We are to follow a **minister's faith** only as it complements and corresponds with the teachings of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

We, the people of God, live by, and are bound by the rules of the Kingdom of God – even now.

I truly believe that God did a great work in raising up the Church era that preached the Gospel message so vigorously – beginning in the mid 1900’s. We were called out of this present evil world – to a new way of living according to the **Law of God**. For many of us our lives have been transformed in a remarkable way.

We haven’t reached the perfection of Christ – but we are a far cry from the days when we knew practically **nothing** of the Plan of God.

We now understand so much more of the Bible than we did when we were Sunday keepers. We know the difference between the spirit in man and the pagan concept of an immortal soul. We have accepted and embraced the Feasts of the Lord, and rejected the holidays of Christmas, Easter, Valentine’s Day and Halloween.

God's Feasts have shown us His master Plan of salvation – past – present and future. Whereas the pagan holidays of the world taught us **nothing** but confusion. We no longer genuflect, make the sign of the cross, kneel or bow before graven images **as some of us did** as Catholics.

We were taught to follow and be obedient to God's Law and the *entire* Word of God. We looked into the Bible to find the answers to life. We learned to look only to God and enthusiastically recognize the **supreme** authority of God the Father over our lives. We discovered the **influence** that the word of God had in **directing** our lives when we heard the Gospel message taught:

2Timothy 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

We realized that we had become citizens – not of states, or nations but of the Kingdom of God. Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"We are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20; our **allegiance** is to Christ, the King of the Kingdom of God).

We found out that we are "strangers and pilgrims" in a foreign land (1Peter 2:11).

Our thoughts, goals, lives changed... when we ere called into God's Church.

The way we eat, the way we speak, our conversation, our conduct, the way we dress, our thoughts, our motivations and our attitudes have all been revised into that which **better represents** holy men, and modest women of God. We've changed, and we are growing.

We try diligently **not** to repeat our first year in God's church over and over again, but to grow in grace and knowledge – ever increasing in the stature of Jesus Christ as we prepare to reign and rule with Him in the Kingdom of God. We guard ourselves against temptations and the sin which doth so easily beset us.

We put on the shield of faith and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God – both defensive and offensive implements in our Christian battle.

And yet we must know that we are still susceptible to the wiles of Satan. His **guile** exceeds our ability to preserve ourselves. That is why Jesus taught us to pray, "Deliver us from the evil one."

I never cease to be dismayed at an attitude that is prevalent among God's people of, "I got it made." That is tantamount to saying, "I've let my guard down" – which we can never do. Satan is lurking...

A lion in the **wild** never starves to death – that is why he is called the king of the jungle. There is always prey to be taken. Interestingly, that is **the very analogy** that God gives to us – if we will hear and heed His words.

1Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant [be serious, clear-minded and alert]; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour:

Could we have a weakness in our spiritual defenses that we must recognize and restore?

The Commandment says, "Thou shalt have **no** other gods before me." (Exodus 20:3)

I suppose that 99.9% of the brethren say to themselves, "I have no problem with that Commandment." "It comes natural for me to give God the preeminence." "Of course, I do not put any other gods before the True God." "There is no Achilles' heel there for me to recognize and restore." "God is first in my life – and that will never change."

Brethren, I submit to you that the Church of God is not giving God the **preeminence** - that is due to him. It has happened before:

Here is a story in the Bible where all Israel refused to receive God as their **unsurpassed** King.

Let me give you the trick question they always **used** to try and trick those participating in the Y.O.U. Bible Bowls. Who was the first king of Israel?

I know, I know, the kids would answer, "It was Saul, It was Saul!"

The correct answer was, **Jesus Christ**.

1Samuel 12:12 ...the **LORD your God** was your **King**.

1Samuel 8:6 But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, **Give us a king to judge us**. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD.

1Samuel 8:7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but **they have rejected me**, that I should not reign over them.

1Samuel 8:8 According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.

1Samuel 8:9 Now therefore hearken unto their voice:

The Israelites would not be dissuaded:

1Samuel 8:19 Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a **king over us**;

1Samuel 8:20 That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

1Samuel 8:21 And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD.

1Samuel 8:22 And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and **make them a king**.

The Israelites made the mistake of seeking a **human king** instead of **God Himself** being their King. Having a king over your nation does not seem to be such a horrible thing to us...

In fact we've become rather used to having kings, prime ministers or presidents over our nations.

It has become customary, normal and expected – almost like, "What would we do if we did not have a national head over us?"

We have presidents and governors over us today – just as Israel chose a king instead of God to rule over them – and protect them.

But we must be extremely careful not to commit the same sin that Israel did – **that** of putting an **authority** between ourselves and God.

That is where the **idolatry** occurs. Nothing is to ever become between us and God. That is what “**before** me” means. No Gods **before** me. It is easy to forget that God is sovereign ruler over all nations and **mere** men serve at His pleasure.

Daniel 2:20 Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God forever and ever: for wisdom and **might** are his:

Daniel 2:21 And he changes the times and the seasons: he removes kings, and **sets up kings**:

We are also told:

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is **no power but of God**: the powers that be are ordained of God.

God says, People do not recognize it yet but they will know that **I am the LORD**. Ezekiel has recorded 70 times variations on: **Then shall ye know that I am the LORD**.

Ezekiel 6:13 **Then shall ye know that I am the LORD**, when their slain men shall be among their idols round about their altars, upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak, the place where they did offer sweet savor to all their idols.

God is dead serious about Idolatry:

Ezekiel 6:14 So will I stretch out my hand upon them, and make the land **desolate**, yea, more desolate than the wilderness toward Diblath, in all their habitations: and **they shall know that I am the LORD**.

I want to make a transition **here** in my sermon – and **not** talk about how the world is negligent to put God first – but consider how the **church brethren** may also be remiss in not putting God first in all things.

I do not know exactly when this new characterization of the church first began to take place. Maybe it was always there – slumbering beneath the surface.

But things changed... as the seed of **separation** began to germinate – men began to say – **be loyal to me** and to **my** organization.

And we could all kind of do that as long as the Law of God and the Sabbath and the Feast Days were **held in tack** by the leader and his organization.

We had a **class** system grow up in the Church of God. Upper-class and lower-class. It should not have been there – but it was. For too many brethren **it is still there**.

Perhaps it emerged from our past ties to the **class system** of England – before we gained our independence. Society there was divided hierarchically within a system that involved the hereditary transmission of occupation, social status and political influence.

Perhaps the class system in the Church of God came about as a result of the widespread **rank and file** military hierarchy of WWII.

Whatever its origin the class system became pervasive in God's church where everyone understood **his place** on the hierarchical church ladder.

Many brethren gladly accepted their **low class role** and were happy for someone else to make their decisions and choices for them – not realizing that was **no** way to build Godly **character**.

It is the responsibility of the ministry to help foster Character **growth** in the brethren. That is not done by keeping the brethren in the dark and feeding them dribbles of milk.

The Biblical model is one of observable transparency.

Read 1 Corinthians 5 and see how Paul had the entire congregation assume **responsibility** for maintaining God's high standards themselves.

You know the story of the man involved in an illicit relationship. Everyone in that congregation knew exactly what was going on – it was obvious.

In the church we all grew up in – the minister would have been called - - and he would have expeditiously disfellowshipped the man.

That is **not** how God wants matters like this to be handled. We know the principle which calls for **purging** sin from among us.

We also know that premarital sex and extramarital sex breed a contemptuous attitude in those who **condone** such illicit behavior.

The entire congregation was in danger of being **corrupted** by **winking** at that ungodly behavior. It was **not** being judgmental to conclude that his salvation was at stake. That man was living in sin, and therefore, not entitled to a continuing fellowship with the holy brethren.

Notice that Paul directs **the congregation** to deal with this sinner using Godly love to help him – not to permanently drive him away.

Paul treats the brethren as equals – not **low class** non-participants.

The purpose of the sinner being separated from the brethren was for the express goal of **restoring** such a one to repentance and salvation.

This **clear** Biblical **model of church governance** teaches us how to govern ourselves amongst ourselves.

The congregation had to **step up** to the plate and **deal** with a most atrocious church problem - - and in doing so they **learned**, and they added to their Godly character.

Paul did not treat the brethren as though they were of a lower class than himself – because they weren't.

You do not treat Christians as though they were **immature** children. Because... If you do they are likely to remain immature children – rather than become the maturing Christians they should be.

Today, many brethren gladly accept that low-class role and are happy for someone else to make their **decisions and choices** for them – **not** realizing that is no way to build Godly character.

The church ministry has taken a wrong approach. It is the old bait and switch con. Here is how Jesus tells us to deal with a problem of this nature:



When a difficult offence has occurred you address the offender:

Matthew 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church [**ekklesia**]: but if he neglect to hear the church [**ekklesia**], let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

But that is not what all the big corporate church organizations teach – **is it?**

They teach, “Bring the problem **to the ministry** – who has the authority to deal with troublemakers.”

I brought this **very issue** up in a ministerial conference some years ago.

The presiding evangelist said “That is the way we’ve always done it.”

He could not be **bothered** with what Jesus actually said should be done in the Church of God.

Brethren the church has **not** governed according to the Biblical **spiritual** principles Jesus has given us - and about which we are well informed.

For this we must repent.

We, the **brethren** and the **ministry** alike, must acknowledge that we have failed to follow Christ first - and confess that no man among us can govern within and among **God’s flock in His stead**.

The brethren are also at fault: The brethren **also** do not stop to realize that by allowing and accepting that control and dominion over their faith – they are allowing another person to be inserted **between themselves** and God.

They **look up to** that minister - and to the organization he represents **instead** of looking directly to God. That clearly violates the principle of the First Commandment.

A minister is wrong to accept authority over the brethren’s spiritual lives – and the brethren are wrong to relinquish their own autonomy to anyone but the True God.

We still called ourselves the Church **of God**, - though God is once removed and replaced by **some man** we’ve been taught to look up to.

The hierarchical system is so ingrained in us that we think it natural and normal.

We see it in the military, in the US Govt. in Corp. America – it is everywhere. But not in the structure of God’s church.

Jesus is the Head. No man is allowed to **insert** himself between you and Christ! That is allowing man to be **before** God. **No gods before me**.

Oh yes, it was very subtle and sly, but we made the same mistake our forefathers made when they sought a human king instead of God Himself.

We have deviated from the truth – like the Catholics do with their Pope - to have stand-ins in place of God.

But somehow it began to be instilled in the brethren that they should look to the representative organization – **Worldwide** – and now some subsequent corporate named church group.

Brethren, we do not do obeisance to manmade organizations – that is Idolatry.

We do not **bow down** before a corporate organization.

Remember when it was said - - that if you were not in “Worldwide” – you were not **in the church**.

Having substitutes **in place of God** started a good while back.

By extension, that concept has been replicated in the scattered corporate church organizations today.

Just last week I heard a minister in the largest corporate church organization speak of his affiliation as “The Church,” and if a person fell away from it – he suffered loss of salvation.

He was saying **in effect** that all the scattered brethren not in his organization were of no consequence at all.

There are an awful lot of brethren that he has no love for...

That is dangerous talk – because we saw the Scripture that says:

*He that **loves not** his brother abides in death...*

Only those who looked to him and his corporation had any credibility in his sight. That is unscriptural.

These church leaders teach that they are set **by God** to be between the members and God Himself.

They teach that rejection or disloyalty to them is tantamount to **rejection** of God.

They teach that one must belong to **their** “one true organization” over which **they** preside – or **not** be members of God’s church.

They do **not** see this as a form of **idolatry**.

What they have done in their own minds – and this is what they teach the brethren – is that their **church organization** and **God’s Church** are one and the same thing.

Brethren, They are **not the same thing**. What is the difference?

Corporate organizations are governed **by men**, whereas the Church of God answers **directly** to Jesus Christ - **the head** of the Church.

Jesus Christ is the head of the church – the “church” being each and every individual – **not** some corporate organization ruled by men.

How can we **help** develop an understanding of how God our Father intends the ministry to **nurture** and feed His flock in accord with the spiritual quality of Jesus’ leadership?

Ezekiel 34:1 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

Ezekiel 34:2 Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

Ezekiel 34:3 Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock.

Ezekiel 34:4 The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.

John 10:1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

John 10:2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

John 10:3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

John 10:4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

John 10:5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

John 10:6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.

John 10:7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

John 10:8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

John 10:9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

1Peter 5:1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

1Peter 5:2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

1Peter 5:3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

1Peter 5:4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Jesus directs the ministry to - **“feed my sheep.”** The focus is on the **needs of the sheep**, not on the **wants** of the shepherds.

The ministers should not be taking care of themselves first – but supplying good Biblical spiritual food to the sheep first.

**God's Church** consists ONLY of those called out of this world by God the Father, Himself, converted and led by His Holy Spirit.

Church **organizations**, however, consist of converted **and** unconverted people, wheat and tares, believers and unbelievers.

Human organizations are **temporal** – they come and **they go** - as we've seen all too often.

God's Church made up of Children of God with His Spirit **is a spiritual** entity.

Human organizations and God's Church **are not the same thing**. Those ministers of organizations have come to believe that they have been given the authority over the affairs of your personal life.

They teach that they have been given **dominion** over your faith by God Himself.

The most egregious misuse of that ministerial office takes place when a member is **unjustly ejected** from the church for political reasons – and not because of grievous sin or heresy.

The belief system that some maintain of a “one man rule” in their corporate organization sends the message to all the other scattered groups that they are entirely left out. It is competition.

It is saying that all the other scattered brethren have no connection to God – because this “one man rule” organization is unwilling to have anything to do with most of the rest of the scattered brethren.

“One man rule” in one corporate organization **hinders** Christian interaction with all the other brethren who have been scattered abroad.

It is flat-out wrong when brethren from two competing corporate church organizations will not allow their brethren to share Passover together in remote areas.

They forbid brethren – both of whom are a part of the Body of Christ – from worshipping together.

In one case I know of a member was disfellowshipped for simply greeting a friend from another group.

Corporate organizations seek control. Ministers are forbidden by their corporate headquarters from **speaking** at the services of another Church of God association. They are severely **sanctioned** by their corporate headquarters for obeying Christ’s instruction:

Mark 16:15 And [Jesus] said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to everyone.

Ministers have been taught that they out rank you – and therefore can command their will over your life. They alone decide what is best for your family, your wife and your kids. You do what they say – or you are out.

The minister believes that he is of a higher class system that relegates the brethren to the commonplace rank and file caste. He sees no reason to do away with the class system because being on top works well for him. He does not apply the Scripture that admonishes us to submit one to another.

Ephesians 5:21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Too many ministers totally disregard the verse that says that the minister is **not** to exercise dominion or authority over our faith – but be a helper.

2Corinthians 1:24 **Not** for that we have dominion over your faith, but are **helpers** of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

Some of these ministers believe that their group of brethren is the **principal** assembly of the Body of Christ.

Some of these ministers believe that God is working **solely** through them. Some of these ministers work to establish a **coercive** hierarchy system of governance with themselves at the summit. They do not hesitate to administer their office with **fear** tactics, browbeating, fear, and intimidation – always holding over the heads of those who would look directly to God – the threat of expulsion from the synagogue or as we would see it – disfellowshippment from the church.

Jesus never ruled that way. He laid down His life and declared that His followers must do the same thing.

Some of these ministers have come to see God as a god who rules **capriciously** through intimidation and coercion – rather than a loving compassionate God who is a Father to His dear children.

There are only a few ministers who teach God's family type manner of governance in His church.

We have got to understand how Satan has subtly pulled off a successful "bait and switch" maneuver that has replaced God's dominion over our lives with a **substitute** system of man-made authority over our lives.

God is **not** the author of **dozens** of church groups who all supposedly believe the same doctrines – but hold for themselves to be the head or **chief organization** in God's sight.

Jesus Christ has only one body. God has only one church. You are either in it or you are not.

Why do church leaders **create** policies that hinder the interaction of the brethren from interacting with different church of God groups?

That is not discerning the Body of Christ – and that is why many who practice this ungodly division are **sick and dying**. They are not discerning who is in the Body of Christ.

1Corinthians 11:29 For he that eats and drinks [the Passover] unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, **not discerning the Lord's body**.

Brethren, do we understand how to discern who all the scattered brethren are? **What happens if we do not** discern who all the scattered brethren are? Next verse:

1Corinthians 11:30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. [That means they are sick and dying.]

Those who maintain that they are the preferred **spiritual authority** over the brethren's lives have usurped a prerogative that is God's alone.

Jesus taught us to pray "**Our** Father," not going through any man that acts as an intermediary between God and man.

That is a role reserved unto Jesus Christ and none other - one **mediator** between God and men.

1Timothy 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Yes, Jesus alone acts as our helper, our intercessor and He reconciled us **directly** to God the Father – with **no** go between.

We have no "Pope" between us and God as the pagans teach. There is no **man** who holds the power of our salvation in his hand. There is no religious leader or his organization that stands between us and God.

Within God's church, there is therefore **no** organization, no man, no leader, no pastor general, no leading evangelist – nobody - **between** God and man.

Faithfulness and devotion to God is not the same thing as loyalty to any man or man-made organization.

Brethren, we need not fear how we stand in the eyes of men. We need **not** fear what they might try to do to us.

Hebrews 13:6 So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

Brethren are we spiritually mature enough to see that those who would pressure their congregants into accepting their **usurped spiritual authority** over the brethren – are in fact usurpers themselves of that authority that only God is allowed to exercise?

Sometimes it is **one-man** rule and sometimes it is by **group** of strong men ruling – but it is all the same – They have subtly put themselves in God's stead.

It is not right when these self-appointed leaders – or men appointed by their peers – rise to the level of **God's appointed leader on earth**.

Does anyone ever try to substantiate their claim from the Bible?

How was the supposed **baton of rulership** passed on to them?

**Was** the **baton of rulership** passed from Herbert W. Armstrong to Joseph Tkach?

How do the ministers who claim to be God's representative **authority** on earth today think that the **baton of rulership** came to them? By force of their personality? By the number of years of seniority that they possess? By the size and number of their congregants?

How does God give them all the authority that they **claim** to have?

Brethren, it does not work that way.

Many of the groups were formed when the scattered brethren coalesced around a personality. Does that "teaming up" convey God's authority to that man over **all** brethren everywhere?

Does that personality then somehow spiritually out-rank all the brethren in God's church? Look at their fruits.

Battered sheep are not the result of Godly works.

"Independent Christian" is a misnomer.

Being an "Independent Christian" misses the mark as badly as does the rejection of most of the **other brethren** who are not associated with one's particular corporate group.

Those are both incorrect approaches.

We have got to stop thinking of God's Church as **some** particular corporate group – and begin to think of God's Church as all the brethren – no matter who scattered them.

God speaks of the church – His people as a collective **one**. We are not to **act** independently without consideration for all the other brethren.

Our submission to the Will of God **places us under** His Government.

That is where we want to be.

Ours is not a "You and me Lord," and I don't care about the others – kind of faith.

Salvation is a matter of togetherness with **all** the brethren.

Isaiah 2:11 The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and **the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down**, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.

Isaiah 2:12 For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is **proud** and **lofty**, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low:

Isaiah 2:17 And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the **LORD alone** shall be exalted in that day.

John 17:21 That they all **may be one**; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

A true minister's service to our Father's flock is to humbly and eagerly lead them, calling them by name.

End: No gods Before Me