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CAN A MINISTER EVER BE REINSTATED INTO THE MINISTRY?

My purpose here is to explain the principles that are involved in the matter addressed in the title of this article, not to discuss any specific cases.

Over the past 50 years quite a number of ministers have been put out of the ministry for a variety of reasons. Many of those cases were only known to people in the local areas where these men lived, while people in God's Church in other areas didn't even know these men, let alone know that they had been removed from the ministry.

In some cases such men then moved to other parts of the country or of the world, where their removal from the ministry was unknown. And later some of these men were reinstated into the ministry by other men who felt they had the authority to reinstate a former minister. Other men who had been put out of the ministry were never again put back into the ministry.

So to make this clear:

This article is not about all the reasons for which a man should be put out of the ministry, though the main ones of those reasons will be mentioned briefly. This article starts from the premise that **some men were indeed correctly put out of the ministry** for biblically valid reasons. This article starts out from the premise that those removals from the ministry were **required by God in heaven**. The question that is then addressed by this article is: for men who were put out of the ministry for reasons that are valid in the eyes of God, **can such men ever be put back into the ministry, or is their removal from the ministry irrevocable?**

The actual reasons why such men were put out of the ministry in the first place are deliberately not the main focus of this article, because there is no reason to be unduly specific on these issues. Some of the reasons could be evaluated somewhat subjectively by some people, and therefore I will avoid such reasons. We don't need or want subjective assessments.

It is sufficient to know that the reasons why some men were put out of the ministry are indeed valid before God in heaven, without mentioning either names (except for one name) or the details that were involved in any specific man's removal from the ministry. Here we are only dealing with those situations where God required that a man be put out of the ministry.

To repeat, the issue is: can such men ever again function as ministers, or is their removal from the ministry final and irreversible? That is the question here in this article.

To create some perspective on this matter, the Apostle Paul spelled out the requirements for a man to be a minister in the Church of God. This is recorded in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. The key verses in our context are verses 2-4.

A bishop then must be **blameless**, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, **of good behavior**, given to hospitality, **apt to teach**; **Not given to wine**, no striker, **not greedy of filthy lucre**; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity. (1 Timothy 3:2-4)

While all of the things mentioned in these three verses, plus the things stated in verses 5-7, are certainly significant, in practical terms certain things in this list make up the main issues that have affected us in God's Church to some degree over the past 50 years or so.

It goes without saying that being put out of the ministry by WCG for refusing to accept and to teach the multitude of heresies that WCG introduced after the death of Mr. Herbert Armstrong is assuredly not a valid reason before God for removing a man from the ministry.

When WCG was taken over by heretics, its actions ceased having God's approval. It follows that from then onwards they had neither the authority to ordain any man into the ministry or to raise a minister's ministerial rank, nor to remove any man from the ministry. They were simply no longer God's Church and therefore any ordinations or reinstatements they performed were clearly not approved by God and of no more merit than if they had been performed by one of the world's churches.

So we should recognize that perhaps some ministers were removed from the ministry by WCG for reasons that are not valid in the eyes of God. And that is not what I am talking about in this article. And in such cases a removal from the ministry most certainly did not have God's approval, and such men should not have been removed from the ministry.

Here I am speaking about **ministers who were put out of the ministry because of violating specific requirements, listed primarily in 1 Timothy 3:2-4**. I don't mean to be exhaustive here in listing the reasons for removing a man from the ministry. And neither are any of my comments directed against any specific man. I am not interested in specific cases. **I simply want to make the principles underlying the question in the title of this article unmistakably clear.** You can then learn to apply those principles yourself, should the need to do so ever arise for you.

My concern for raising this question here is that for over 40 years the Church has repeatedly violated the principles that are involved in this matter of ministers being restored into the ministry. We should understand that this particular issue is **a major cause for the scattering of God's people** at this present time. And the consequences of the 40+ years of violating the applicable principles here have assuredly hurt God's Church. It is time for the record to be set straight.

The responsibility for these principles being violated lies squarely with Mr. Herbert Armstrong!

Briefly, the main issues that have affected us over the past 40+ years that constitute valid reasons before God for removing a man from the ministry are:

1) To be a minister, the man must be "**blameless**", and Paul was here referring primarily to "**matters of morality**" with this attribute of "blameless"! That is why Paul immediately followed the word "blameless" with the expression "the husband of one wife". Paul's implication is that, in order to be blameless, the man's sexual activities must be restricted to that "one wife". Sexual transgressions therefore constitute a major reason before God for removing a man from the ministry. We need to realize that the expression "the husband of one wife" was specifically intended by Paul to clarify what he was referring to with the attribute "blameless". Sexual transgressions have always been the most common reason why a man had to be put out of the ministry. And thus that is also the first issue Paul addressed here in 1 Timothy chapter 3.

2) The expression "**of good behavior**" certainly also makes all forms of immorality, as well as obviously all criminal behavior, valid reasons for removing a man from the ministry.

3) The expression "**not given to wine**" covers addictions to drugs in addition to alcoholism. So if a minister becomes an alcoholic or a drug addict, then this statement by Paul requires that the man be put

out of the ministry.

4) The expression "**not greedy of filthy lucre**" obviously covers things like stealing money and financially defrauding people in the Church as a significant reason for putting a man out of the ministry.

5) While Paul did not directly mention this point, another very strong reason for removing a man from the ministry of God's Church is if that man knowingly teaches heresies to God's people. We might perhaps view that as a glaring violation of the "apt to teach" requirement for the ministry. This particular point is not a matter of ignorantly teaching things that are wrong.

Rather, if a man is willing to **teach things he himself knows are not true**, just in order to keep his job, thereby knowingly defiling his own conscience, then he has disqualified himself and must be removed from the ministry, because such a man will surely be removed from the ministry in the sight of God. This point applies, amongst others, to the ministers who stayed with the old Worldwide and the unbiblical teachings that were introduced after Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986. In God's sight those men have been removed from the ministry.

So if a minister commits adultery or steals money or knowingly teaches heresies or becomes an alcoholic or a drug addict, then he must be removed from the ministry. And in such cases that removal from the ministry is required by God!

Yes, there are additional reasons for which a man might also have to be removed from the ministry. But this list is sufficient to illustrate the principles that are involved.

As already stated, here in this article the question is: **once a man actually has been removed from the ministry for biblically valid reasons, can he ever again be put back into the ministry, or was that removal from the ministry irreversible?**

The principles that apply here are the same, irrespective of the specific reason for which a man was put out of the ministry. That is, whether a man was put out of the ministry for adultery or for stealing or for drug addiction or for any other valid reason, **the principles** that determine whether or not he can ever be reinstated into the ministry **are always the same**.

Those principles are the specific focus of this present article.

Now in all of the cases of a man being put out of the ministry that I personally am aware of, the man was never put out for a first time offence. In all the cases I am aware of the man was removed from the ministry only after repeatedly transgressing in some of these things.

A PRINCIPLE TO CONSIDER

That approach is in agreement with the principle God already revealed in the days of King Saul.

King Saul was initially humble and faithful to God. And during that time God blessed Saul's activities (e.g. against the Ammonites in 1 Samuel 11). Then Saul sinned grievously by presumptuously offering a burnt offering (1 Samuel 13:9), performing a duty that was restricted to the priesthood. The reason Saul committed this sin was because of a lack of faith. Saul was fearful and lacked faith in a testing situation. That presumptuous act was sufficient to warrant God removing Saul from being king. However God did not do that, and Saul continued to be king with God's approval.

God then gave Saul another chance to make good, by giving Saul very specific instructions to destroy all the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:3). We are familiar with this story. Saul once again did not obey God fully. So after that God then said to Samuel: "It repents Me that I have set up Saul to be king, for he is turned back from following Me" (1 Samuel 15:11). Whenever something "repents God" it means that God has made a decision to change something. This is something we need to understand quite clearly: **when God "repents" then something must change!** If nothing changes it would mean that God has not really repented. Without change there is never any real repentance.

Samuel understood quite clearly that God had made a final decision to reject Saul from being king. And so Samuel told Saul: "The LORD has rent the kingdom of Israel from you **this day**" (1 Samuel 15:28). **That decision was final**, no matter how deeply and how sincerely Saul might have repented after this (which he didn't do!). The decision was final and that was it!

The lesson for us is this:

When a man with whom God is working sins, then in many cases God will initially try to still work with that man, to give him the opportunity to repent and to change from his sinful ways. What God will be watching is whether or not the man really does change and leave his sins behind. If, after some kind of warning, the man then returns to the same sins, then God stops working with that man and makes the binding decision to remove him from whatever status or position he may have had in God's scheme of things, be it king, priest, prophet or minister.

In other words, God **may** extend mercy for a first offence, but if after that there is then a relapse into that exact same type of sin, then God makes a final decision to remove that man from his position. **With God there is no third or fourth or fifth chance** for the same type of transgression. The reason for this is as follows:

If a man has a relapse into a previous category of sins, then this means that the man did not really repent in the first place. Real repentance excludes the possibility of going back into that same type of sin!

Most people in the Church have never understood this correctly!

There is no such thing as repeatedly repenting for the same type of sin! If we find that we have to repent today for the same things we had to repent for last week and the week before that and the month before that, then we didn't really repent at any time in the past for this particular type of sin. We had only been fooling ourselves.

Feeling sorry and guilty for what we have done is not repentance! Repentance is not a feeling!

We can feel sorry time after time for doing something wrong. But that has got nothing to do with repenting! If all we do in those situations is feel guilty and sorry, then we are as far removed from real repentance as every other unrepentant person on the planet! Unless we make a firm commitment, and unless we actually stick with that commitment, we haven't even started on the road towards real repentance. We haven't really changed our way of thinking.

Thus, if King David had ever again committed adultery after the one incident with Bathsheba, then that would have been the end of his relationship with God. As far as adultery was concerned, David was never going to get a second chance at having adultery forgiven, after he had repented for his adultery with Bathsheba. Other sins and transgressions may need to be dealt with, yes. But something we have really repented of can never again receive the same response from God with future transgressions (i.e. for someone with whom God is working in this age). You have never really understood this before, have

you?

So:

When a man has done something worthy of being removed from the ministry, **if he seeks forgiveness**, then God may give him the opportunity to repent, **without God actually removing him from the ministry**. But if the man then after that goes back to that same type of sin, then this proves that he didn't really repent for the previous occasion. Real repentance precludes the possibility of ever committing that specific type of sin again.

We can repeatedly "be sorry" (NT Greek "metamellomai") for the same type of weakness or transgression; but we cannot repeatedly "repent" (NT Greek "metanoeo") of the same type of transgression. Repentance is explained in detail in my November 2013 article entitled "What is Real Repentance?".

Repentance requires a changed way of thinking, a changed way of using our minds, **a changed way of the mind responding to the temptation** to which we had previously given in. So when a man, after having had a first offence forgiven without being removed from the ministry, goes back to that same type of transgression, then **God removes that man from the ministry**. **And that removal** from the ministry **is irreversible**.

That's one of the things we learn from God's dealings with King Saul.

Now the Bible is very vivid in talking about this type of thing. For example: if a man commits adultery today, and then is deeply remorseful and overcome with feelings of guilt, but then again commits adultery next week or even ten years later, only to again experience the same feelings of guilt and remorse, then the true proverb that "**the dog has returned to his own vomit**" is true for that man! See Proverbs 26:11 and 2 Peter 2:22.

That proverb applies to all of us if, **after feeling guilty** and remorseful for something, **we then go back** to doing that same thing again. Going back to a sin we had wishfully hoped to leave behind proves that the way our minds work has not changed (i.e. we haven't really repented), because whatever tempted us to commit the sin in the first place is still able to tempt us again and again. **The way our minds respond to that temptation** has not changed, and therefore we cannot possibly be repentant in this specific matter.

Understand the most basic and fundamental point about repentance, which is this: repentance demands that the mind responds differently to any temptations to which it previously succumbed. If the response of our minds to previously experienced temptations has not changed, then we have also not yet repented. This is something you may not have understood before? But it is extremely important for all of us to understand this matter correctly.

So people who say something like "I constantly have to repent for losing my temper or for gossiping or for ..." don't know what they are talking about! Their repeated feelings of guilt and remorse are not and have never been real repentance. Without in some way changing the way our minds work it is impossible to repent in a godly way. And a changed way of using our minds will lead to changes in our conduct and behavior, because **a changed mind responds differently** from the way the unchanged mind responds to specific previously experienced temptations.

So back to our ministers who were removed from the ministry.

When a minister does something worthy of being removed from the ministry, in many cases (there are

exceptions to this, which exceptions I will discuss in a moment) he should be given a discreet warning. In many cases God will allow the man to continue in the ministry, **provided he changes the way his mind responds** to the specific temptations he had given in to. But if the man then ever goes back to that same type of transgression, irrespective of whether that is months later or whether that is decades later, then God will remove him from the ministry, and that decision will be permanent.

TWO DIFFERENT MINDS

There are also some situations when a man must be put out of the ministry without being given "a second chance". Let me try to make this clear.

When a minister sins because of impulse or fear, or in highly pressured circumstances of temptation, then God will frequently give that man another opportunity, without immediately putting him out of the office he occupies. The reason is that the sin is due to weakness. This applied to King Saul's first episode. Saul was scared of his enemies, and his fear tempted him to act presumptuously in usurping the priest's office. In this case God gave Saul another chance.

But that was not the case for King Uzziah, who also usurped the priest's office (see 2 Chronicles 26:16). Uzziah's transgression was not on impulse or motivated by fear. Uzziah's transgression was very calculated and deliberate and arrogant. And so in Uzziah's case God immediately struck Uzziah with leprosy which was irreversible; i.e. it stayed with him till the day of his death (see 2 Chronicles 26:19-21).

So two different kings both presumptuously performed the duties of a priest. They did this with **two completely different motivations**. The one man (Saul) was motivated by feelings of fear and insecurity. The other man (Uzziah) was motivated by pride and arrogance. The one man's actions (i.e. Saul) were a spontaneous response to fear and they were not premeditated. The other man's actions (i.e. Uzziah) were definitely premeditated and very calculated.

So God gave the one man (Saul) a second chance. And the other man (Uzziah) received an immediate penalty from God that remained with him for the rest of his life. And no depth of repentance was going to change that decision in Uzziah's case.

Can you understand **why** God dealt differently with these two on the surface very similar transgressions by two different kings?

Let me try to spell this out.

1) If a man does things worthy of being put out of the ministry on impulse in response to unexpected temptations, or from a motivation of fear or a lack of real discernment, then God may give that man another chance to prove himself faithful and committed and loyal to God. His problem was weakness and God wants to know if he can overcome that weakness. This man does not have a motivation of trying to get his own way, to get what he wants to get. He foolishly sinned on impulse.

2) If a man does things worthy of being put out of the ministry from a motivation that is obviously **premeditated and** also very **calculated**, then the man does not get another chance. In this situation he must be put out of the ministry immediately. This man's problem has nothing to do with weakness. He has thought his situation through and **he is working the angles** to get what he wants. His transgression is very calculated and presumptuous. God never shows patience with people who in very calculated ways work the angles to get what they want to get, **and then offer to repent**. God will not work with that kind of mindset, because that mindset is basically anti-God! And over the past several decades many

men (here I don't necessarily mean "ministers") in the Church have taken this approach in order to get a new wife. Such men need to understand that God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7).

Examples of this second type of situation would include:

A) A man who is committing adultery, where other people (his wife, some church members, other ministers, etc.) are aware of the fact that the man is committing adultery, but **he carries on anyway**. If he continues to commit adultery until he is finally dealt with by those in authority, then he needs to be put out of the ministry immediately. His adultery was not due to being spontaneously and unexpectedly tempted. No, he knew in advance that he would again commit adultery every time that he would see that particular woman. **There is no second chance for that type of attitude.** When a minister continues to commit adultery week after week or month after month, then he must be put out of the ministry immediately and permanently. That is because his continued adultery is calculated and premeditated. And therefore he must be removed from the ministry immediately. That is how the mind of Christ responds to premeditated sins!

B) A man (minister or otherwise) is put out of the Church for biblically valid reasons, and **the man then promptly starts his own church** in opposition to God's Church. This type of action is also not due to any pressure on the man. Such an action is thought out and **deliberate and** very **calculated**. Therefore someone who starts his own church because he was put out of God's Church for biblical reasons, has clearly been removed from the ministry by God. If such a man was not even a minister to start with, then he certainly continues to be a non-minister before God in heaven, and certainly also a non-member of God's true Church for that matter.

The teachings such men may initially establish in their own churches are totally immaterial in reaching these conclusions. **Such men cannot pressure God to accept them into His ministry** simply by adopting some or even all of the correct teachings. If their actions were an expression of rebellion against God's Church (and not against the heretical organization that Worldwide became after Mr. Armstrong's death, which is a completely different issue), then the church they establish will not have God's acceptance or approval. **It will not be any part of God's Church!**

C) If anyone who is a minister decides to "throw in his lot" with such a new church that has been started in rebellion against God's Church, then that minister also ceases to be a minister of God with immediate effect, and there is no "second chance" to get back into the ministry. The reason is once again that such a decision to join someone who has started a new church to compete with the established Church of God is also not made under duress. It is **a calculated and premeditated decision**. This means that such a man has disqualified himself from being a minister, without the opportunity of getting "a second chance".

Can you see the principles that are involved in giving some men "another chance to make good", while other men must be removed from the ministry with immediate effect and without any possible "second chance"?

The key lies in the frame of mind the man had when he first did things worthy of being put out of the ministry. **Premeditated and calculated wrong decisions are never eligible for "another chance".** Premeditated and calculating thinking has done something to that mind, which is not the case when someone sins on impulse or because of some kind of fear. The state of the perpetrator's mind is always the key as to whether he should receive "another chance" or not after a first offence before being put out of the ministry.

If you have the eyes to see it, this is the difference in the frames of mind between Judas Iscariot betraying Jesus Christ and the Apostle Peter denying Jesus Christ three times. One was premeditated

and the other was an impulsive response motivated by fear.

Now obviously, those who are guilty of premeditated and calculated conduct that is worthy of being removed from the ministry immediately, will also appeal for mercy (i.e. should they desire to come back if they had left or were put out). They will claim to be repentant. They obviously want another chance once they have been removed from the ministry. They don't understand that the penalty for premeditated and calculated wrong conduct is always greater than for the same wrong conduct motivated by fear or by an unpremeditated impulse.

So in cases where the Church has put certain men out of the ministry for these biblical reasons, then those decisions assuredly have God's approval. It is beyond doubt that God will reject a man from the ministry for repeatedly committing adultery or for knowingly teaching heresies, etc.

The point that hasn't always been understood is:

WHEN GOD REMOVES A MAN FROM ANY OFFICE, THEN THAT MAN CAN NEVER AGAIN BE RESTORED TO THAT OFFICE! WITH GOD A REMOVAL FROM ANY OFFICE IS ALWAYS FINAL AND IRREVERSIBLE!

So any of the men who have been put out of the ministry for biblically correct reasons during the past 50 years can never again in the sight of God function as ministers. They can never again be put back into the ministry. God has rejected them from fulfilling that responsibility. Their repeated sins disqualified them from ever again being ministers.

Do we think God is playing games? Do we think God is desperate so that He "needs" one particular man? Do we think God will ever say: "Look, I have to put you out of My ministry for your repeated acts of adultery, but I want you to know that **I really want you back in My ministry** once you have repented"? That line of reasoning is selfish, perverse, absurd and offensive to God! And any man who would reason that way would be flattering himself.

1 SAMUEL 15:29

This verse explains the fact that once God has removed someone from an office, then that removal is always final, without exceptions. Let's notice the context.

And Samuel said unto him, **The LORD has rent the kingdom of Israel from you this day**, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, *that is* better than you. (1 Samuel 15:28)

Samuel tells Saul that God has on that very day removed "the kingdom" from Saul, meaning that "this day" God determined to terminate Saul's dynasty in Israel. Note that Samuel did not say or mean that Saul would stop being king on that very day. Not at all. Samuel knew that Saul would still be king the following day.

What Samuel said to Saul is that **Saul's potential line of kings** would end with Saul's death, which is what the expression "rent the kingdom of Israel from you" means. And that is exactly what happened.

The next verse explains that **this decision was final** and could not be reversed under any circumstances. Thus even if Saul had right then repented deeply and sincerely and with deep humility and then thereafter never again sinned, the decision that his dynasty would come to an end with his own death was still irreversible. Notice what Samuel said:

And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: **for He *is* not a man, that He should repent**. (1

Samuel 15:29)

Samuel was aware of Genesis 6:6 ("it repented the Eternal ...") and other similar statements about God repenting. And here Samuel was not making an absolute statement about God that would apply in all contexts. No, Samuel was making **a context-specific statement** about God! Samuel's statements in verse 29 were made in specific reference to and with applicability to his statements in verse 28. The principle of verse 29 is relevant to the statements in verse 28.

So let's look at this statement "God is not a man that He should repent" more closely. For a start, we need to understand that this statement is not in any way speaking about sins or sinning. To make this very plain:

Samuel was not speaking about a man repenting after sinning! This statement is not about sinning in any way whatsoever!

In verse 28 Samuel had told Saul about a decision that God had made. And then in verse 29 Samuel told Saul that **this decision was irreversible**! And not a single word in verse 29 is a reference to sins or even an allusion to sins. The word "repent" is used twice in verse 29, but in neither case is it a reference to sins.

Can you understand this?

Let's examine verse 29 phrase by phrase.

"The Strength of Israel **will not lie**" means that God really would give the kingdom of Israel to Saul's neighbor (i.e. to David) who was better than Saul.

"The Strength of Israel **will not repent**" means that God will not change His mind **in this specific matter**.

The statement "for **He is not a man that He should repent**" means that human beings frequently do change their minds regarding decisions they had made earlier. Human beings are fickle and unreliable. But God is not like that. This is a specific reference to God always sticking with a decision God has made.

Before God makes a decision to impose some penalty, God usually gives a warning. As long as God gives warnings, it means that the final decision has not yet been made by God. But once God makes a decision then absolutely nothing can change that decision. That is what the statement "God is not a man that He should repent" means.

Can you understand that the word "repent" in this verse refers to making binding irreversible decisions and not to sins or sinning?

Thus, for example, **before the flood** God warned human beings for a long time before deciding on some penalty for sinful mankind. But 120 years before bringing on the flood God made a decision to destroy mankind by a worldwide flood (Genesis 6:3). And even if many human beings had come to a deep and genuine repentance during those last 120 years, nothing could stop God from destroying the world with a worldwide flood 120 years later.

The only thing that genuine repentance by large numbers of people during those last 120 years could have achieved is change the number of people that God would have protected during the flood. But the decision to bring on a worldwide flood could not be changed by anything once God had made that

decision.

THAT IS HOW GOD'S MIND WORKS!

And that is what the statement "God is not a man that He should repent" means.

We see exactly the same approach when God destroyed **Sodom and Gomorrah**. When Jesus Christ and two angels came to Abraham, Jesus Christ said: "I will go down now and see whether they have done ..." (Genesis 18:21). In other words, God had not yet reached a final decision on how to deal with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham then reasoned with Jesus Christ regarding sparing the city if there were 50 or 45 or 40 or 30 or 20 or 10 righteous people in Sodom. In each case Jesus Christ's answer revealed that there was still the theoretical possibility that Sodom could be spared, IF at least ten righteous people could be found there. But since there were less than ten righteous people in Sodom, therefore by the time the two angels came to Lot the decision to destroy Sodom was final (see Genesis 19:13). And so God removed Lot from Sodom before destroying that city.

This same principle is also seen in God's dealings with Israel regarding **entry into the promised land**. When the 12 spies returned from searching the land, Joshua and Caleb gave a good report (Numbers 13:30). But the ten other spies gave an evil report and scared the people of Israel (Numbers 13:32-33). So the people rebelled. That was the tenth time that the people of Israel tempted God by rebelling (Numbers 14:22). So right then God made the decision that as a penalty the Israelites would wander for 40 years in the wilderness (Numbers 14:33). That decision was final!

The very next day the people "mourned greatly" and acknowledged "we have sinned" (Numbers 14:39-40). They were now eager to follow God's earlier instructions to enter the promised land. But it was now too late! 24 hours earlier they had refused to go into the promised land, and now it was too late. God never changes any decision that He has started to implement! You can read all of Numbers chapters 13-14 to get the whole picture of this incident. The point is that any decision that God makes is always final and cannot be reversed!

So here is the principle of 1 Samuel 15:29:

Once God takes action in response to any man's sins, then that action can never be reversed, irrespective of how deeply the man may repent thereafter. So once God has removed a man from the ministry of God's Church, then that man can never again in this life be restored into the ministry. That is what "God is not a man that He should repent" means.

The Apostle Paul explained the same point to the Hebrews. Paul states that if anyone who has progressed so far as having possessed God's Spirit falls away, then "**it is impossible** ... **to renew them again unto repentance**" (see Hebrews 6:4-6). Those are not empty words. The point is this: if it ever gets to the place where God takes His Spirit away from someone, then **that person can never again receive God's Spirit**! That is what David understood when David after his adultery pleaded with God "take not Your Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11). If God at that point had taken His Holy Spirit from David, then that would have been the end of the road for David. David understood this and he realized the immense danger he was in before God.

Paul is making the same point in these verses in Hebrews 6. And that principle is: if it ever gets to the point where God takes something away from a man, then that man can never again receive that "something" back. That "something" could be a position, like king or having been a minister in the Church, or it could be God's Holy Spirit.

God never takes something lightly away from a man, as in "I'll take this from you now but I will give it back to you later if you repent". When God takes away His Spirit or when God removes a man from an office, then that action can never be reversed.

Hebrews 6:4-6 and 1 Samuel 15:29 both make this point very emphatically.

By now you might be saying: wait a minute, are you saying that the man who has been removed from the ministry can't repent and be received back by God? No, I am not saying that at all.

WHAT REPENTANCE WILL DO FOR THE MAN

A minister who has been removed from the ministry for specific sins can most certainly repent just like any other member of the Church can repent of those same sins, though that repenting absolutely must take place before it gets to the point where God takes His Spirit away from that man.

We should also recognize that repeatedly committing those sins, whatever they might be, after having been warned will make real repentance very difficult. **Repeatedly offending in the same sins**, after having been previously confronted and warned, **does something to a person's mind**! Without going into details I will just say that that is an extremely dangerous position to be in. And all of us need to make sure that we never end up in the position where like a dog we return to our own vomit.

Anyway, if the man who was put out of the ministry truly repents and **changes the way his mind responds** to the specific temptations he had in the past given in to, then God will surely accept the man's repentance and restore the man into the fellowship of God's people.

BUT REPENTANCE CAN NEVER RESTORE A FORMER POSITION THAT GOD HIMSELF HAD TAKEN AWAY FROM THE MAN!

When we repent of sins, then our guilt is forgiven. But forgiveness does not restore "all the goodies" that were taken from us when we sinned. Repentance removes our past guilt and restores for us access to God ... and that is it!

When a person's repentance is motivated by a desire to have some "past glory" restored (i.e. to be restored into the ministry), then that repentance is in fact selfish and therefore not real repentance at all. Repentance never, never leads to a restoration of some "past glory", i.e. some position of responsibility within God's Church, which God had taken away from the man.

And nobody is indispensable to God! The best speaker and the best teacher and the most compassionate pastor can never receive back their former positions if God has put them out of their respective offices for some or other sins. God doesn't need inspiring speakers that badly that He has to depend on reinstating them into their former positions. Consider what John the Baptist told the Pharisees in Matthew 3:9, that God could raise up children to Abraham from stones if God wanted to do so.

Now **the whole problem** that we have had in this regard for the past 40+ years, of some ministers inappropriately being reinstated into the ministry, **is primarily Mr. Herbert Armstrong's fault**!

It was Mr. Armstrong's son who was such a "powerful speaker" on the radio and TV program that ended up committing sins for which a man must be put out of the ministry. The first time that happened he was not put out of the ministry, but only warned privately. That was very likely an appropriate procedure to follow. But then he got involved in exactly the same sins again.

THAT WAS WHEN MR. HERBERT ARMSTRONG SHOULD HAVE PERMANENTLY REMOVED HIS SON FROM THE MINISTRY! BUT HE DIDN'T DO THAT!

That was in fact the time when God Himself removed Mr. Armstrong's son from the ministry of the Church of God! And from then onwards in the eyes of God Mr. Armstrong's son was never again a minister of God! **Never again!**

But Mr. Armstrong was initially partial to his own son. And so Mr. Armstrong only "suspended" his son after that second episode of sins. In due course Mr. Armstrong restored his son into the ministry, and **gave him back all his former duties and responsibilities**! That was a huge, gigantic, enormous mistake!

It was a mistake of the same magnitude as **King David's mistake** in restoring his son Absalom to his former status as a prince. When Absalom had murdered his half-brother Amnon and then fled for his life, Absalom had forfeited the right to ever again be seen as a prince and as a potential heir of King David. But on Joab's advice David foolishly, and against his own better judgment, restored Absalom to his former princely status. Having already committed murder once, Absalom then promptly planned to murder his own father as well, in order to attempt to usurp the throne, which throne God had already promised to Solomon. Absalom should never have been reinstated as a royal prince, a reinstatement that had catastrophic consequences. Absalom's act of murder had permanently disqualified him from the position of ever again being a prince in the nation of Israel.

Getting back to Mr. Armstrong's son, as it turned out, Mr. Armstrong's son then had to be put out of the Church and out of the ministry once again, and that time for good. But it was too late. **Mr. Armstrong had set the wrong precedent** that when a minister is removed from the ministry, then upon repentance he can also again be restored to his former ministerial status. And so, since then a number of other ministers, who were removed from the ministry for biblical reasons, have sought to be reinstated as ministers. Or maybe they seek to function as ministers in a different Church of God group?

This procedure has ignored the most basic fact of all, that once God removes a man from a certain position, then that man can never again be restored to that position, no matter how deeply and genuinely he repents.

When we repent, then God accepts us back into His Church; but repentance can never remove the consequences of our former sins. Repentance can no more restore to us our former positions than genuine repentance can restore the teeth or arm or leg or eye or hearing we have lost because of foolish conduct. Even after repentance the consequences of sins always remain with us for the rest of our lives. Ditto for a ministerial status that was taken away for sinning.

As it turned out, Mr. Armstrong's son later started his own church, which only compounded his problems before God. God was not with him when he started his own church in defiance and in rebellion. Whether the teachings he established in his church were right or wrong is **totally immaterial**! God didn't care what teachings Mr. Armstrong's son would establish in his own church! God had rejected him from being a minister, and **the church he started was simply never at any time God's Church**!

So if any of you joined his church, then for the whole time that you were a member of that church, you were not attending any part of the Church of God! You need to understand the truth! The church Mr. Armstrong's son started did not at any time represent the true Church of God, irrespective of what teachings that church might have implemented. It was a church that was started in defiance and with a completely selfish motivation.

So to be clear:

Mr. Armstrong's dealings with his son set a precedent for restoring ministers to full ministerial status after they had repented for the sins that led to them being removed from the ministry. **That precedent was bad and it was wrong!** And the fruits have been bad!

There is something else you may not have considered before:

When a minister has been removed from the ministry for biblical reasons, if that minister is then restored to the ministry he does not have God's approval. God has not reinstated the man into the ministry, no matter what some or other CoG organization may have done. And when that "restored minister" then preaches and teaches as he used to do before he was put out of the ministry, **he is going to introduce heresies into the Church! That is inevitable!** And that has been a major factor in causing the Church to be scattered and divided in so many ways over the past two to four decades.

The same is true if that minister goes out and in rebellion starts his own church! Whether the teachings he initially establishes are right or wrong is immaterial. The point is that he had neither authority nor approval from God to start his own church. And without authority from God to start his own church, his church is no different from other churches in the world. And sooner or later his church will embrace some heresies.

The only time a minister can go out from God's Church and start a new church is if God's Church has started to reject God's truth and begun to accept heretical teachings, as was the case with Worldwide after Mr. Armstrong's death. The reason it is acceptable to go out and start a new church in that type of situation is because the organization that used to be God's Church had by its own actions ceased to be God's Church, and therefore it became incumbent upon ministers and members alike to go out from Worldwide.

Teaching heresies is something that has happened in every case where a man, who had been put out of the ministry for biblical reasons, was then restored into the ministry in some teaching capacity, or else he then started his own church. God is not working with the man, and therefore his inspiration is certainly not coming from God. I repeat, it is inevitable that a man in that situation will endorse or introduce some heretical ideas.

It was Jesus Christ who pointed this out. Notice:

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:22-23)

Jesus Christ is here speaking about people who would claim His name for their actions and for their teachings. Three times they say "in Your name" to Christ. This is not talking about people who were Catholics or Baptists or Methodists, etc. This is speaking about people who were operating amongst God's people in God's Church.

They claim to have given **sermons** (prophesied in Your name) and to have **anointed the sick** (cast out demons in Your name) and to have **done "many wonderful works"** (organized feast sites and youth camps, published literature, organized baptizing tours, visited people in various countries around the world, etc.) in Christ's name.

[COMMENT: Anointing is for seeking God's intervention with all health problems other than those caused by demons. The expression "cast out devils" in Matthew 7:22 is used to represent **all health issues** that are brought to the ministry, including the matter of anointing the sick. In practical terms ministers in our age would be involved far more often in anointing the sick than in casting out demons.

My comments here are not intended to imply that people should be anointed for demon problems, not at all. It is simply a case that today ministers are far more frequently involved in anointing the sick than they are involved in casting out demons.]

In other words, these are men who claim to have been ministers in God's Church. And they performed the duties and responsibilities of a minister. This means that **they were also mistakenly accepted by some or even by many of God's people as ministers**. They were good speakers with nice personalities, and they were compassionate and merciful and understanding in counseling God's people. Yet Jesus Christ says to them "I never knew you, **so get out of here**"!

And notice the last part of Jesus Christ's statement. To these men who supposedly had preached wonderful sermons and who had prayed for the sick and who had cast out demons and who had done many wonderful works Jesus Christ says "**you that work iniquity**"! That is something God's people hadn't noticed, that these people spoken about in Matthew 7:22-23, who preached to them and who prayed for them when they were sick and who cast out demons and who were so compassionate and kind in their counseling, were in fact "working iniquity".

But **that is** something that is **inevitable**, that any man who preaches and teaches God's people, either when God has not put that man into the ministry, or when God has in fact put that man out of the ministry, will "work iniquity". That is inevitable!

This is something we need to understand! Matthew 7:22-23 are the words of Jesus Christ. And these words must surely apply to some men who functioned as ministers amongst the people of God in the past, and who are functioning as ministers amongst God's people today.

So to spell this out very clearly:

Any man who presumes to teach God's people about the ways of God, without God having called that man to that teaching responsibility, will unavoidably "work iniquity". That is what Jesus Christ's words signify.

So whether men set themselves up as teachers, or whether men who were put out of the ministry by God attempt to get back the teaching responsibilities they used to have, all such endeavors will lead to Matthew 7:23. **There are "many" men in this situation today**; that is what Christ's statement "many will say to Me in that day" tells us. And so there will be "many" who attended with a Church of God group to whom Jesus Christ will say "I never knew you". One of the things this expression "I never knew you" means is "**what you did, did not in any way have My approval**".

And in every case, without exception, such men in such teaching situations will introduce some error amongst God's people. That is inevitable because such men do not receive their inspiration from God. It is self-evident that none of the men to whom Jesus Christ says "I never knew you" were ever inspired by Jesus Christ.

The next thing to notice here is the **two diametrically opposite points of view**. **These men** believe that they have preached in Christ's name; but Jesus Christ says that only amounted to "working iniquity". **These men** believe that they had cast out demons and had been instrumental in people being healed; but Jesus Christ says that all their casting out demons and their anointings only amounted to "working iniquity". **These men** believe that they had done "many wonderful works" in Christ's name; but Jesus Christ says that all those works only amounted to "working iniquity". In other words, Jesus Christ says that **everything these men have done** (preaching, teaching, casting out demons, anointing, etc.) **only amounts to "working iniquity"**.

Jesus Christ's words to the men in Matthew 7:23 are very blunt and direct, with no chance of misunderstanding what Christ was saying. These words are addressed to people who had not been called by God to teach God's people. That includes two distinct groups of people: on the one hand there are those who were either never called to the ministry by God, but who were erroneously ordained into the ministry or they took it upon themselves to become teachers for God's people; on the other hand there are "ex-ministers" who try to re-establish their former positions in the ministry in some way.

Today we have a lot of heretical ideas floating around amongst the scattered people of God. And most of those heretical ideas were spawned by men who either were rejected from the ministry by God, or else were never called into the ministry in the first place, but they set themselves up as teachers anyway.

Now understanding the mind of Jesus Christ means that we understand that God will never, under no circumstances whatsoever, restore a man into the ministry, whom God Himself had previously put out of the ministry. It is immaterial how deeply the man has repented; and it is immaterial how great a teacher and preacher he had been before he was put out of the ministry. **Once God puts a man out of any office, then that decision is final.**

What is not final is the relationship the man can have with God. Sins separate us from God. If the man really repents, then God will most assuredly accept the man back into the body of Christ. And penalties that have not yet been enacted, but only threatened, may be averted by genuine repentance. However, positions and status that have already been taken away by God can never be restored. Repentance does not lead to former blessings being restored; **repentance only takes the second-death penalty off the table**. And that is extremely important.

Paul was very aware of the fact that if he went off the track, that he would end up being "a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27). He understood that if he somehow disqualified himself from being in the ministry, then he would never again get back into the ministry. Paul had in mind the things he mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 regarding the qualifications for the ministry, when he made this statement regarding "keeping his body under".

Now here is how this matter could affect you.

Men who are not ministers or who were put out of the ministry by God do not have the authority to anoint you when you are sick. Now they may still have a smooth, slick, polished routine for doing anointings, but they don't have the authority to anoint anyone "**in the name of Jesus Christ**". And neither do they have the authority to teach you the true teachings of God.

This is something you need to understand when you contemplate asking such a man to anoint you for a sickness. Matthew 7:22 tells us very specifically that some people will anoint the sick "in the name of Jesus Christ", and Jesus Christ then tells them "**I never knew you**". This means that they had no right and no authority to anoint anyone "in the name of Jesus Christ". They were simply acting presumptuously when they anointed people "in the name of Jesus Christ". This is extremely serious.

The principle in this whole matter is very simple: God does not remove any man from any office on a whim. Frequently God continues to work with a man who is starting to go off the tracks. But once it gets to the point where God actually removes a man from the ministry (or from any other position of authority within God's Church), then that man can never again be restored to that position. He can repent and be accepted back into the Church and have the second death penalty taken off the table. And he can grow in grace and in knowledge. But he can never again in this life be a minister of God.

When God takes an office away, then that is always an irrevocable decision. God doesn't play and

say "**I'll give it back to you if you repent**". That is simply not the way that God works!

THE INEVITABILITY OF HERESIES BEING INTRODUCED

You do understand that the things that God inspired to be recorded in the Old Testament, were recorded for the specific purpose of giving us examples to learn from, don't you? You know 1 Corinthians 10:11, right?

Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and **they are written for our admonition**, upon whom the ends of the world are come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

So consider the following events that were recorded for our admonition. Then ask yourself: in what way does this particular account "admonish us"?

Moses and Aaron were brothers. Obviously both of them were Levites. God then gave the priesthood to Aaron and his sons. Aaron's sons were the cousins of Moses's sons. However, the sons of Moses and their descendants could never be priests; the priesthood (a parallel to the ministry today) was restricted to those who were in fact close relatives of Moses's sons and grandsons; i.e. it was restricted to the line of Aaron. And Moses's line, even though they were also Levites, could never get into the priesthood. The men in Moses's line had to be content with less prestigious positions, serving their cousins and uncles in the priesthood.

Now as long as they were alive, Moses was always far more important than Aaron. All of Israel knew that. So amongst the common people the sons and grandsons of Moses were also very prominent during Moses's lifetime, somewhat like the sons of prominent rich people today who bask in the prestige of their powerful parents. When they are stopped for speeding, they might say to the policeman: "do you know who I am? Do you know who my father is?" The sons and grandsons of Moses were in that type of position: so close to the priesthood, and yet so far away from it. But they had plenty of public prestige amongst the common people.

Soon after Israel crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, a grandson of Moses named "Jonathan the son of Gershom the son of Moses" (see Judges 18:30) traveled around the country looking for a way to earn a living. His cousins were now the priests, but he himself was jobless and penniless. Yet he was of the line of Moses. This account is recorded in Judges chapters 17-18.

Basically Jonathan was looking to in some way make a living from religion. He was a Levite. He didn't inherit a piece of land on which he could raise crops. He knew all the things that his cousins would do in performing their priestly duties. If necessary, Jonathan could probably have performed many of the priestly duties blindfolded, yet he was not allowed to do that. He was like the pastor's kid who has grown up in the Church, who has heard over a thousand sermons, and who knows every routine in Church off by heart. Jonathan certainly knew how to perform the job of a priest, though he had never yet actually done the work of a priest. But he had watched his uncles and his cousins all his life from close quarters.

So in his travels Jonathan came to the house of the Ephramite Micah, who offered him the job of being his (Micah's) own private pagan priest, presiding over a house of idols. Jonathan gladly accepted the job and became a private pagan priest. After all, he had been looking for a religious job. Then the tribe of Dan sent scouts to scout out some new territory where the Danites could settle down.

Now notice something very interesting!

When these scouts from the tribe of Dan came to Micah's house, they didn't at first see Jonathan, but they heard his voice coming from inside the house. Now we have something extremely unusual for Old Testament times.

Without even setting eyes on Jonathan, **these Danites recognized the voice of Jonathan**. They were from the tribe of Dan, and Jonathan was from the tribe of Levi. No voices had ever been recorded at that time. So they hadn't heard Jonathan on the radio or on TV. And yet they immediately recognized the voice of a man from a completely different tribe. See Judges 18:3. So then these Danites went into Micah's house looking for Jonathan to greet him.

How could they recognize Jonathan's voice? They had never seen Jonathan function as a priest, because Jonathan was not a son of Aaron. Yet his voice was known to them, and therefore presumably also to many other people throughout the nation of Israel.

The answer is that Jonathan had been a part of **the extended first family in the nation**. They knew that he was a grandson of Moses. In their eyes Jonathan was an important person, somewhat like a member of the nobility.

Later 600 armed men from the tribe of Dan came back and offered Jonathan the job of becoming a pagan priest for the whole tribe of Dan (see Judges 18:19), presiding over pagan graven images. Now notice Jonathan's response:

And **the priest's heart was glad**, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people. (Judges 18:20)

The grandson of Moses, who could never have become a priest of God, "was glad" to become the chief pagan priest for a whole tribe of Israel. Finally he had found his calling, was the way he felt. Finally he had made it "into the ministry". Finally he had "his own church". He was elated.

As the story continues:

And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and **Jonathan**, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, **he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan** until the day of the captivity of the land. And **they set them up Micah's graven image**, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh. (Judges 18:30-31)

(**COMMENT:** It is well known that "Manasseh" in verse 30 in the KJV is a mistranslation, and that it should correctly read "Moses". This has been corrected in many translations like ASV, DARBY, ERV, RSV, NRSV, etc.)

Notice that Jonathan set up a priesthood that also became **hereditary**, passing from father to son. Now finally Jonathan could be just as good as his priestly cousins from Aaron's line. Now finally he was their equal.

The Ephraimite Micah had made a bunch of idols. Many other Israelites at that time also had their own idols like that. But **it was the grandson of Moses**, who undoubtedly had envied his priestly cousins and uncles, **who introduced idolatry on a tribal level into the nation of Israel**. The grandson of Moses had formed a competing priesthood to the priesthood of Aaron. And Jonathan's pagan priesthood continued uninterrupted right up to "the day of the captivity of the land".

So much for this story. So can you figure out what "admonition" God wants us to get from this story? What is God trying to tell us with this story? **What lessons would the mind of Christ learn from this**

account?

One of the main lessons we should get from this account is that whenever people who are not called by God to those responsibilities manage to become "priests" or "ministers", **it is inevitable that they will introduce some heresies (false teachings) into God's true religion**. This matter is unavoidable! Since God is not the One who made them "priests" or "ministers", therefore God will obviously not be the One inspiring them. And without God's inspiration the introduction of heresies is always inevitable.

It is impossible for such "priests" or "ministers" to teach the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Can you imagine God looking down from heaven on such men and saying:

"Hmm, I didn't put them into the ministry of My Church (or I put them out of the ministry of My Church), but they are actually doing a tremendous job in teaching My people the truth. I only wish that some of the men that I myself put into the ministry were half as good as these men whom I have not put into the ministry."

That can obviously never happen, right?

Those who are not placed into the ministry by God will invariably introduce some heresies into the Church, by providing a blend of truth and error. This is the first and greatest lesson that God wants us to get from this account.

This has been true throughout the history of God's people ever since then. The trails for pagan ideas infiltrating God's true religion always lead back to people who managed to somehow get into the priesthood or into the ministry or to usurp religious authority in some other way (e.g. the Pharisees in Judaism taking over and kicking the Levitical priests out of all religious influence, etc.).

The second lesson we should get from this account is that all the men who inveigle themselves into the priesthood or into the ministry do so for **totally selfish reasons**. Moses's grandson Jonathan wanted a priest's office for totally selfish reasons. He wanted the same prestige and public recognition that his uncles and cousins received from the general population. He **coveted the public image** of a priest. And he wanted a steady income.

A SELFISH MOTIVATION

This second lesson which we can learn from the account of Moses's grandson brings us back to King Saul.

Whenever a man is put out of the ministry by God and then seeks to get back into the ministry, **his motivation is always**, without exception, **selfish**! This point was vividly demonstrated by Saul, who was removed by God from being king. When, after Saul's first disobedience, God gave Saul another chance and told him to utterly destroy Amalek (1 Samuel 15:3), Saul once again disobeyed God out of weakness. In this case it was because he "feared the people and obeyed their voice" (1 Samuel 15:24). Then God removed Saul's potential dynasty, and Saul's kingly line ceased with Saul's death more than a decade later.

Notice how Saul's mind worked once he was told that God had rejected his family line, though Saul was allowed to remain as king till his death:

Then he said, I have sinned: ***yet*** **honor me now**, I pray you, **before the elders of my people, and**

before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD your God. (1 Samuel 15:30)

For a start, Saul's words "I have sinned" were hollow and meaningless. Anyone who says "I have sinned, **yet honor me now**" is obviously totally unrepentant. A mind that is still concerned with receiving honor is not a changed mind; it is an unrepentant mind.

Saul was very concerned about two specific groups of people:

1) the elders (i.e. the leaders) in the nation

2) the whole nation in general.

For a minister these two groups of people are:

1) the fellow-ministers

2) the people in the Church in general.

When finally boxed into a corner by Samuel, Saul's greatest concern was that he wanted at all costs to save face before the elders and before the whole nation. And if he had to say the words "I have sinned" in order to save face, then he would say those words.

We need to recognize that whenever a minister has done something worthy of being put out of the ministry, then his greatest concern is in most cases the same as was Saul's concern ... it is **to save face before other people**!

What we need to recognize is this:

The desire to save face after a transgression is always evidence of a lack of real repentance for the transgression. It is a selfish motivation. It is a concern for one's image (see Psalm 39:6), while pushing aside the penalty which is deserved. Our desire to save face is an attempt to circumvent the automatic consequences of wrong actions. King David didn't get to save face, did he? His sins are recorded for all to read in the Bible.

People whose primary concern is to save face, as was the case with King Saul, are never really repentant!

The next thing we need to recognize is that when we help someone in a serious transgression to save face, then we are actually making it far less likely that they will ever really repent; i.e. in such a situation repentance is not impossible but just far less likely.

This is a basic principle we need to grasp! When we help anyone, adult or child, to avoid certain negative consequences of their wrong actions, then we always take away from them some of the incentive to repent of their wrong actions; i.e. we take away the motivation from them to change the way their minds will in the future deal with the temptations that led to those wrong actions.

Recognize this!

It is God Almighty who instituted negative consequences for wrong conduct. God's reason for instituting negative consequences for wrong conduct is to provide an incentive and a motivation to not repeat that wrong conduct. Penalties for wrong conduct serve a very important purpose. Therefore when we help people to avoid certain negative consequences for their wrong actions, then we are actually working

against the God-ordained intent for those negative consequences, and that will make it less likely that the people involved will repent.

Can you understand this? That is the principle of Proverbs 29:15.

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left *to himself* brings his mother to shame. (Proverbs 29:15)

There is a serious mistranslation in this verse. The words "to himself" are not in the Hebrew text; they were only provided by the translators. But the translators clearly provided the wrong words!

The correct meaning here is: "**the child left unpunished**" or "**the child left without the rod and without reproof**". These are the words the translators should have provided, instead of the words "to himself".

It is not a matter of leaving the child "to himself"! It is really a matter of **leaving the child unpunished** and uncorrected for specific wrong conduct or wrong behavior that is specified in the last part of that verse.

But the principle of this verse is by no means restricted to children. The principle inherent in this verse applies to everyone, adults and children. That principle is this:

When we are somehow able to avoid "the rod" and "the reproof" due for our wrong actions, then it will lead to shame later on! That is the point of this proverb.

So when we have tried to cover up the actions of ministers that required those ministers to be put out of the ministry, we haven't helped those ministers at all. The reason is that such covering up often took away **the incentive to make a real change** in their minds, regarding how their minds would respond to the same temptations in the future, and as a result in many cases it was only a question of time before they once again got involved in those same actions. And then they had to be publicly put out of the ministry.

And once they were publicly put out of the ministry, then saving face became a major issue. And one way for them to try to save face is to work towards being restored into the ministry. After all, they are still great speakers and they can still give fantastic sermons. And if they could manage to get back into the ministry, then that would represent a certain vindication for them.

In their own eyes they were still just as good as the next minister. They would achieve Saul's demands (applied to their own circumstances) ...

- yet honor me now before all the ministers, and

- yet honor me now before all the members of the Church.

... by being restored to their former status in the ministry.

1 Samuel 15:30 reveals Saul's main concern when the kingdom of Israel was "rent" from him (1 Samuel 15:28); **he was concerned about his public image**. And the lesson we need to draw from this account is that when a man is removed from the ministry, then his main concern is likewise his public image before his fellow-ministers and before the whole membership of the Church.

Instead of striving to get back into the ministry, the man should have the repentant attitude of the

prodigal son. But **that is seldom the case when a man seeks to get back into the ministry**. Let's look at that account.

THE REPENTANT ATTITUDE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

You know the story. The younger son demanded his share of the inheritance and then spent it all on a licentious lifestyle. When he then got into serious trouble, he changed his thinking, i.e. he repented.

And **when he came to himself**, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! (Luke 15:17)

"When he came to himself" means that he had a change of heart. **He changed his way of thinking.** This changed way of thinking is identified by the words he plans to say to his father.

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, **I have sinned against heaven, and before you, And am no more worthy to be called your son: make me as one of thy hired servants**. (Luke 15:18-19)

This is how Jesus Christ illustrated real repentance! There is no better way to illustrate what God expects from us when we repent than to look at the words that Jesus Christ put into the mouth of this repentant son. These words reveal a complete change of mind from the way the man's mind had worked previously.

Notice the man's attitude.

1) He freely admits his transgressions. He is not hiding any wrong doing.

2) He recognized that he is no longer worthy of the status he used to have.

3) He certainly does not demand to be "reinstated" into his former position.

4) He was quite willing to be just an ordinary servant, no special status.

With that repentant attitude his father gladly accepted him back as a son. However, he was not reinstated as an heir of his father's estate. He didn't get back what he had previously had, i.e. a 50% stake in the family wealth. This is quite clear from the father saying to the elder son "**ALL THAT I HAVE IS YOURS**" (Luke 15:31). The younger son had no more claim on any part of the inheritance. But he was accepted back by the father into a father-son relationship.

How does this apply to men who have been put out of the ministry?

If they really have a change in their thinking, if they really repent, then first of all they will not make any efforts to be reinstated into the ministry. They will not appeal to their "sermon-giving talent" just to help out the poor under-staffed and over-worked ministry. **They will think of themselves as not worthy of functioning again in a ministerial capacity.** They will willingly recognize that once God puts a man out of the ministry, then that decision can never be reversed. Their removal from the ministry was final.

With such an attitude **God will joyfully accept them back as sons**, but without any reinstatement into any former position of influence in the Church. And they will then once again become "heirs of God" (Romans 8:17). And the second-death penalty will have been taken off the table. So they will be eligible

to inherit in God’s kingdom along with everyone else in the first resurrection. But the loss of ministerial status will stay with them for the rest of their physical lives.

On the other hand, if they in any way are motivated by a "yet honor me now before the people in the Church by reinstating me into the ministry" attitude, then they will obviously not be accepted back as sons by God. The attitude they have is vital in determining their status before God and in determining their future eternal destiny. That attitude of "yet honor me now" would imply that they don’t understand that God will never give back an office which God has taken away from someone. When it goes so far as God taking an office away from someone, then that person can never again function in that office before God.

TWO DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

We need to make a clear distinction between two completely different situations that transgressors may face in their relationship with God.

First, there is the situation where God extends a warning to someone who is going off the track. Such warnings will typically spell out certain imminent penalties for the transgressors, unless they stop sinning. Examples of such warnings include God’s dealings with the priest Eli (1 Samuel 2:27-29) and with King Saul, and God’s warning to Nineveh through the Prophet Jonah.

In this type of situation the penalty God has predicted can still be averted by the people involved making some changes in their lives. This is the situation that is addressed in Ezekiel 33:14-15.

Again, **when I say** unto the wicked, **Thou shalt surely die**; **if he turn from his sin**, and do that which is lawful and right; *If* the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; **he shall surely live**, he shall not die. (Ezekiel 33:14-15)

The purpose for threatening dire penalties is to motivate the people involved to change their sinful ways. If the people heed the warnings and change their ways, then God does not impose the penalties He had threatened to impose.

A vital key for us to understand is that any penalty that has been announced by God in advance of that penalty being implemented can still be avoided! It can be avoided if people really repent and change. Whenever God announces a penalty in advance, God does so with the hope that maybe He will not have to enact that penalty. Such an advance announcement is an expression of God’s hope that it will motivate people to change, so that God will not have to impose the penalty.

Consider God’s dealings with King Ahab.

After Ahab and Jezebel had killed Naboth and taken his vineyard, God sent Elijah to Ahab with a scorching message, which Elijah delivered in the bluntest possible way (1 Kings 21:17-24). The next verse tells us that "there was none like unto Ahab, who did sell himself to work wickedness". He was one of the most evil kings in Israel’s history. But this blunt message seemed to get through to Ahab and probably scared him half to death. So Ahab actually made an effort to change.

And it came to pass, when **Ahab** heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and **put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted**, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. (1 Kings 21:27)

Ahab did exactly what the dire warning was supposed to motivate him to do; he made an effort to

humble himself before God. Now this wasn't real repentance, but it was probably the best one could expect from a totally carnal and unconverted man. And Ahab's change didn't even last very long. But God still responded to this effort from Ahab. So God said to Elijah:

Seest thou **how Ahab humbleth himself before me**? because he humbleth himself before me, **I will not bring the evil in his days**: *but* in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house. (1 Kings 21:29)

This is a very powerful illustration of the purpose for God's warnings of impending penalties. God really wants people to change, and when they do change, then God modifies what He had intended to do.

So: a prediction of penalties at some future date can still be changed. That prediction need not come to pass, provided the people involved make the changes in their lives that God expects them to make.

Thus when a minister is warned for a first transgression without being put out of the ministry, he still has the opportunity to remain in the ministry, provided that he really repents. The warning provided the opportunity to avert expulsion from the ministry.

Now let's look at the other situation.

Second, there is the situation where a penalty from God has already been implemented. Once God has removed a man from an office (as king or priest or prophet or minister, etc.), the man can still repent. But the man's repentance can never lead to getting back the office from which God had removed him.

The point we need to understand here is this:

God never removes a man temporarily from the ministry. God will never say: when you repent then I will put you back into the ministry. That attitude (i.e. I'll put you back into the ministry if you will repent) amounts to fickleness! It amounts to playing games. It amounts to dealing with a grown mature man like we deal with very young children, as in telling a small child: when you do what I have told you to do, then I'll give you what you want from me.

When God enacts a penalty for transgressions, then that enactment can never be reversed. So the answer to the question in the title of this article is:

Once God has removed a man from the ministry of God's Church for whatever reason, then that man can never again be reinstated into the ministry. That is what "God is not a man that He should repent" tells us.

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