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HOW CAN PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH BRAZENLY LIE?

Recently I was looking at some of my very early articles, written in and around 1995. That was a turbulent time for the Church of God. Mr. Armstrong had been dead for less than ten years. And the new administration in the Church was introducing **heretical teachings** at an ever-increasing pace.

Church members had been conditioned to accept the teachings that headquarters would put forward. After all, the leaders at HQ were supposedly diligently studying the Bible, and they had embarked on a course of, also supposedly, correcting all the "minor errors" in the teachings Mr. Armstrong had put into the Church, with one technicality here, and another technicality there, always asserting slightly different explanations than what had been taught previously.

And for the first few years after Mr. Armstrong's death those "changed explanations" seemed like nothing more than technicalities, which didn't seem to change things very much. But they were nudging us in a certain direction. Then, around 1994, things came to a head when the new administration attempted to change the teaching about the nature of God. One man gave a lengthy series of Bible Studies, basically aimed at getting church members to accept the trinity teaching, and to reject the understanding that God is in the process of building the Family of God. That series of studies was perverse.

Then another evangelist at Pasadena gave a sermon that was to be played in all congregations around the world. The title of his sermon was "Unfinished Business". It was aimed at defending the trinity doctrine. In response to hearing that sermon I then in March 1995 wrote an article which I entitled "The Facts About 'Unfinished Business'". That is the article I was looking at recently, which triggered all these memories.

We have forgotten a lot over the past 25-30 years. But as I read through that old article, it all came back to me. And the thing that struck me most forcefully was:

the blatant and deliberate lying and hypocrisy that was involved in trying to pressure God's people to accept all these heretical teachings!

Virtually every single one of the many different men who were involved in trying to get us to reject the true teaching about the nature of God, and to accept the pagan trinity teaching instead, resorted to lying and to twisting the Scriptures ... and **they actually knew that they were twisting the Scriptures**. Many ministers ended up going along with the new heretical teachings, and endorsing those teachings; and those men then did their best to convince the members of God's Church to also accept these heretical ideas.

I strongly disagreed with that sermon, and I had made a verbatim transcript of that entire "Unfinished Business" sermon, so that I could study it carefully and in-depth before responding to it. And the lies that were presented in that sermon were just so brazen.

Furthermore, on one videotape (i.e. different from the "Unfinished Business" sermon) the leader who had taken over from Mr. Armstrong had said point blank: **"The trinity teaches exactly what the Bible does"**. When he said that he knew better than that. But other "leading men" then said similar things, to endorse the trinity teaching.

So as I read through that old article I was thinking:

How on earth can any member of God's Church, let alone men who are supposed to be "leading ministers", possibly lie with a straight face about what Mr. Armstrong taught, and about what the various Scriptures mean, and about why the most important verses supposedly don't really mean what they plainly state? How on earth is that possible? Where is the fear of God?

It is one thing if we are deceived and ignorant. But it is something altogether different **when we know that we have to lie** in order to support our position, when we know that we will have to twist any number of Scriptures that contradict what we are teaching.

In that case there is no possible excuse!

When anyone resorts to deliberately lying in an attempt to justify a false teaching, deliberately trying to twist the meaning of various Scriptures that contradict his position, then there is no excuse that could be appealed to.

Whenever we knowingly lie, then **we also know that God knows** that we are lying! God can never be deceived by any lies! So **why** would anyone possibly do that ... deliberately lie about what the Scriptures mean, in order to justify a false teaching, as was done in that "Unfinished Business" sermon? What could be **the motive** for such lies?

I have no desire to drag the names of men who have long been dead into this discussion, by quoting example after example. We don't actually need any examples to drive home this point. The attitude underlying the approach of dealing deceitfully with the teachings of the Bible has always been with us. **Many people will lie to support their own beliefs.**

And when they do, then that is irrefutable evidence that **they don't fear God!**

It is the fear of God that can prevent us from lying when we try to defend indefensible teachings, when we know that we will have to argue against what the Scriptures plainly state, if we wish to uphold our own point of view. In such a situation it is the fear of God that forces us to reject the "indefensible teachings".

Let's examine this manifestation of the lack of the fear of God more closely. Here is a lesson from the Apostle Paul.

THE MINISTERS ARE THE PROBLEM

The Apostle Paul had raised up a congregation in Ephesus. In time there were a number of ministers in that congregation. The time came when Paul realized that he was unlikely to ever see the people in Ephesus again. So Paul called all the ministers together and told them:

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: (Acts 20:22)

Paul then gave these ministers some parting instructions. Here is what Paul said:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the holy spirit has made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He (i.e. Jesus Christ) has purchased with His

own blood. (Acts 20:28)

Instead of viewing this statement just as something that Paul told the ministers from Ephesus, **let's view this as something Mr. Herbert Armstrong might have said before his death to the entire ministry** in our age today, and by extension to every member of God's Church.

Do we actually "take heed" to ourselves? How do we do that? Did all the ministers who accepted the heresies that were introduced do that? Did all the church members who willingly accepted those heresies "take heed" to themselves? No, they didn't, did they? What happens when we don't take heed to ourselves? Why, we end up deceived and being talked into accepting heretical teachings and beliefs.

Paul then told those assembled ministers, paraphrased:

"God has given you the responsibility to spiritually 'feed the Church of God'. You have the responsibility to protect the sheep, to oversee their spiritual well-being. Never forget that they are not your sheep; they belong to Jesus Christ. And you are to look after them for Jesus Christ."

Paul's expression "take heed to yourselves" means "**guard your minds**", or "hold your minds to yourselves". Paul implied that if they did not consciously control their own minds, then they might end up not fulfilling the responsibilities they had been given by God. That is something that has also happened in our age.

Now how do we "take heed to ourselves"? How are we to go about guarding our minds? That is actually very simple. Do you know how?

We commit ourselves to pray regularly, to study the Bible regularly, and to fast occasionally. The first step is always to pray regularly, meaning daily! The other steps are then built on that foundation. **If we do not pray to God regularly**, then we are not "taking heed to ourselves". And if we ministers don't take heed to ourselves, then we ministers will not be able to fulfill the responsibilities God has laid on us. **It all goes back to praying regularly**. And that is something many people in the Church were not doing back in the 90's, and are not doing even today. And all the ministers who accepted the heretical teachings were not praying regularly.

Now notice why Paul (or we might even apply this to Mr. Armstrong) issued this admonition.

For I know this, that **after my departing** shall **grievous wolves** enter in among you, not sparing the flock. (Acts 20:29)

Paul knew what would happen. And Mr. Armstrong likewise knew what was likely to happen. That is why Mr. Armstrong at one point said (and I personally heard him say this) that many men were circling around him like vultures, just waiting for him to die. And he was right. He could see "those vultures".

Verse 29 presents step one in the process of Satan trying to destroy the Church of God. After a strong church leader has died, totally **unconverted men** from outside **infiltrate the ministry**. They gain positions of leadership and prominence. And all they care about is advancing themselves, at the expense of God's people. They couldn't care less about "the flock". They are in it for whatever they can get for themselves. And for a while they are quite willing to appear "in sheep's clothing", if that is what is required. These are the people Jesus Christ also warned us about.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly **they are ravenous wolves**. (Matthew 7:15)

"False prophets" means that they present themselves as ministers or as spiritual leaders. They "come to you" means that they enter the Church and obtain influential positions. "Sheep's clothing" means that **they deliberately disguise their real intentions** (and was that ever true for those who succeeded Mr. Armstrong!). They know that they themselves are certainly not "sheep". "Ravenous wolves" means that they are greedy and covetous and very selfishly motivated.

"Not sparing the flock" (from Acts 20:29) means that they couldn't care less as to who gets hurt by their selfish dealings, even if they become jointly responsible for some in the flock forsaking their calling and going back into the world.

Here is the thing to note about these individuals, about whom both Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul warned us:

These men are not deceived! **They know** that they are wolves, and therefore they disguise themselves. Their own intentions are very clear to them. And so **they infiltrate** the Church of God, with the explicit intention of advancing themselves. Such infiltration certainly also happened while Mr. Armstrong was still alive ... they were the "vultures" Mr. Armstrong could see. Such people have no real concern for the people of God. **And, most importantly, they were not called by God to positions of leadership!**

They preach lies. They don't explain the Bible to God's people because they themselves don't understand the Bible. All they are capable of doing is to present heresies to God's people.

For **they prophesy falsely** unto you in my name: I have not sent them, says the LORD. (Jeremiah 29:9)

This is a description for our time. Today there are vast numbers of people who want to be spiritual leaders, but who **have not been sent by God**, and who "prophesy falsely". To "not be sent by God" makes clear that **they are all unrepentant and unconverted**. To not be sent by God means that they cannot possibly have God's spirit.

Now once this process of unconverted men infiltrating God's Church is established, then Satan proceeds with step two.

Also **of your own selves** shall men arise, **speaking perverse things**, to draw away disciples after them. (Acts 20:30)

Once unconverted men exert some leadership within the Church of God, **then** some of the men who had been faithful ministers up to that point in time are persuaded to also turn to preaching perverse heretical ideas.

This process we have also witnessed on a large scale in our age!

Some of those who had on the surface "supported Mr. Armstrong" for many years switched, and also started "to speak perverse things", you know, like: God is (supposedly) a trinity; and Jesus Christ (supposedly) was created by God the Father as one of the leading angels; etc.

Yes, today there are very many "perverse" teachings amongst people who during Mr. Armstrong's time were a part of God's Church.

Acts 20:30 applies to men who **switched their allegiance** from obedience to God and His laws to being willing to preach whatever people want to hear. For them their allegiance was a matter of expedience.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall **they heap**

to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

This has been fulfilled in our age on a grand scale. Why are they willing to preach "fables"? Paul revealed the answer in Acts 20:30. The reason is: **"to draw away disciples after them"**. So why have some men today introduced some rather strange ideas amongst their followers? It is **to get and to retain a following!** They need to show that they are in some ways different (and implied is "more correct") than all the other church groups. And so they introduce new teachings into their groups. And the smaller their group, the greater is their need to do this.

The motivation is exactly the same as was the case with ancient King Jeroboam. Notice **why Jeroboam made the "doctrinal change"** from worshiping in Jerusalem to worshiping two golden calves.

Jeroboam was afraid that the people would be influenced by "the established doctrines" to continue looking to Jerusalem for leadership, and that eventually the people would go back to "the house of David" (see 1 Kings 12:26), and then they might even decide to kill him (see verse 27). So Jeroboam reasoned:

What we need is some new doctrines. If we make those new doctrines very appealing to the people, basically giving people what we know they really want anyway, then the people will be highly motivated to accept our new doctrines. And when they accept our new doctrines, which are different from the old teaching, then that automatically ties all the people to us, because the new (and more desirable!) doctrines are not accepted by the old crowd back in Jerusalem. So the people will then be loyal to us.

That was Jeroboam's reasoning.

And so **he changed the doctrine about the nature of God**. He made two golden calves, and then said: "behold, your gods, o Israel" (see 1 Kings 12:28). And the majority of his people were quite content to accept these golden calves. Mission for changing the doctrine accomplished!

What Jeroboam did almost 3000 years ago is basically the same as what many men have done today since the time Mr. Armstrong died. **Change some doctrines in order to create loyalty amongst your followers.**

But that again brings us back to: don't they fear God? How can they do that and think that God will not punish them? Do they actually have God in the picture? Do they really think that God will accept such conduct? Or don't they care?

The men who have changed the teachings of God and accepted heresies instead "know the judgment of God". They know that deliberately twisting the meaning of specific Scriptures in order to endorse a false teaching will be punished by God. But they do it anyway.

Who **knowing** the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but **have pleasure in them that do them**. (Romans 1:32)

They take pleasure in seeing others accept their heretical ideas. Paul was here speaking about **people who have no excuse** for their **wrong actions**; and that principle applies equally to **wrong beliefs**.

In Acts 20 the Apostle Paul pointed out very specifically that the responsibility for the introduction of heresies into the Church of God lay squarely with the ministry! It is **the ministry** that is responsible when heresies are accepted by people in God's Church.

But if people are willing to lie in order to try to establish heresies within the Church of God, **how can they do that?** Don't they have any conscience towards God? **Don't they know** that when they knowingly twist the Scriptures in order to endorse heretical teachings, that they are signing their own death warrants before God? **Didn't Judas know** that he was signing his own death warrant when he went out to betray Jesus Christ? That's what Jesus Christ had told him in so many words. Let's understand that a sinful mind is in many cases very fatalistic.

WHY IS THE SINFUL MIND SO FATALISTIC?

What is it that makes people behave in such perverse ways?

Do you know?

Here is the answer:

Satan is a totally irrational being! He was totally irrational when he decided to rebel against God and to organize his followers into an army to fight against God. What was Satan going to do to God in that fight? Was he going to try and choke God to death? Or kill God with some magic weapon? What could Satan possibly do to God to defeat God? Nothing! Nobody can kill God and nobody can take God's power away from God. There is no way that anyone can do anything to God to defeat God. Attacking God is not only irrational, it is the height of stupidity. So Satan was an absolutely stupid being when he attacked God, with not one shred of real wisdom left in his "spirit brain".

Yes, Satan's rebellion was doomed to failure before it even got started. But the irrational and very stupid **Satan just couldn't see that**. Satan actually believed that he had a chance of overthrowing God. Any rational mind would have realized that it was impossible for Satan to defeat God. But Satan was no longer rational.

When we sin then we lose wisdom. And without repenting we will never get back the wisdom we have lost.

Satan is utterly selfish! He doesn't really care for the well-being of any of the angels (now demons) that followed him in rebellion against God. Satan only cares about himself and nobody else.

Furthermore, Satan actually **hates** the human beings that follow his leadership, and who embrace his selfish way of thinking. He wants to see them destroyed! Satan "uses" human beings, but he still hates all of us, even those who do his bidding. Satan has a totally perverse and depraved mind. And he cannot think logically any more.

Now his own mind and his own attitudes Satan "broadcasts" to human beings. The vast majority of human beings alive today think and reason just like Satan does. That's why he is the "god" of this present age (see 2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan is in control of the minds of most human beings, not by directly possessing people, but by broadcasting his irrational attitudes to their minds. A major focus of Satan's mind is to hate anything that stands for God. It is first and foremost **the mind of Satan** that is "enmity against God and not subject to the law of God" (see Romans 8:7).

The fact that this verse also defines the natural carnal human mind is evidence for just how pervasive is Satan's influence in the way our human minds naturally function and operate, with just as much enmity against God as Satan himself has.

Coming down to Satan's ultimate penalty: Satan knows that his time is running out. He knows that after

his brief freedom at the end of the millennium he will be permanently banished into "the blackness of darkness" (see Jude 1:13). There is nothing Satan can do to change that fate. And so Satan's attitude towards what lies ahead for him is one of **indifferent defiance**. He is not about to change his attitude and his contempt for God's way of life. He is set in his resentment of everything that stands for God. And Satan is extremely bitter.

We know that Satan is "the tempter" (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5). But that is only half the picture. Satan's real goal is to get as many human beings as possible to commit sins "**which will not be forgiven**" (see Matthew 12:31). Satan's goal is to get us to commit what we commonly call "the unpardonable sin". Satan seeks to permanently destroy as many human beings as he can possibly influence with his toxic attitudes.

Now understand the following point:

Acceptance of any of Satan's attitudes automatically causes a person to become irrational!

It doesn't matter whether someone becomes greedy or covetous or arrogant or proud or conceited or vain or dishonest or devious or hypocritical or resentful or ... any other satanic attitude. If someone embraces any of these satanic attitudes, then **that person will automatically also become irrational!**

So why was Satan himself irrational? He wasn't irrational when God had first created him. No, he had become irrational at some point after God had sent him down to this Earth with one third of all the angels. Satan had become irrational when "his heart was lifted up because of his beauty" (see Ezekiel 28:17). Satan became irrational as a result of embracing a selfish, vain attitude.

Sinners are always irrational! That is an unavoidable consequence to sinning. The only way to shake off that irrationality is to repent of whatever the wrong attitude may be. But accepting any of Satan's attitudes always includes as a bonus receiving totally free of charge Satan's irrational mindset. That's because Satan's ungodly attitudes are the products of his irrational way of thinking.

Satan's irrational way of thinking was a consequence of Satan embracing a selfish way of thinking. And so Satan became the father of all irrational thoughts. Out of his original selfish thoughts grew all the other satanic attitudes.

So when Satan is able to tempt people into sinning deliberately in a very calculated way (e.g. I will have to twist the meaning of this Scripture so that I can deceive people into accepting this heretical trinity teaching, etc.), then they also automatically take in Satan's couldn't-care-less defiant attitude. So yes, they understand that it is their penalty to be permanently blotted out in the lake of fire, but that knowledge has no impact on them. It is kind of like the smoker who knows that smoking causes lung cancer, but he will continue to smoke anyway.

When people sin knowingly, knowing in advance what their penalty is going to be, then they are behaving just like Satan himself behaves.

It is a very perverse satanic mindset that says:

Okay, so I'm heading for the lake of fire. I'll deal with that when the time comes. But meanwhile let's see how many people I can take with me. And "**I will have a perverse pleasure**" in seeing other people follow my example, right into the lake of fire (see Romans 1:32 again).

When you understand some of these things, you should also become less frustrated with the people who

simply don't accept the perfectly logical explanations which you present to them. If they are harboring any wrong attitudes or emotions, then their minds will not be rational on those issues which would require them to change in some way. They can't understand your perfectly logical explanation, because they harbor one or other of Satan's attitudes. They also don't want to understand your logical explanation.

It is because their minds are not capable of reasoning in a rational way as long as they embrace any of Satan's attitudes, that **logical, sound reasoning cannot get through to them.**

To put this another way:

The attitudes we embrace determine the limitations on our ability to think and to reason logically and rationally.

I have said many times that real repentance requires us **to change the way we think**, to change how we use our minds. But it only becomes possible for us to change the way we think if we **first reject Satan's attitudes**. As long as we still embrace any of Satan's attitudes, so long it will be impossible for us to change our way of thinking, so long it will be impossible for us to really repent.

For example, if our minds are still very receptive to becoming proud, vain, arrogant, greedy, covetous, resentful, hypocritical, etc., then we are simply not capable of changing the way we use our minds. When we put those wrong attitudes out of our minds, then that opens the way for our minds to become rational, **and then** God's truth will make sense to us. But if we then allow pride and vanity to creep back into our lives, then we lose the rationality we had attained.

We all know Jeremiah 17:9.

The heart *is* **deceitful** above all *things*, and **desperately wicked**: who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

As long as we are vain or arrogant or hypocritical, etc., so long our hearts cannot be trusted. Why? Because our minds are not capable of rational thinking. Those wrong (really satanic) attitudes make our minds unreliable in exactly the same way that they made Satan's mind unreliable. Any one of these wrong attitudes has that effect. These attitudes make our minds "desperately wicked".

That's also why James could say:

A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways. (James 1:8)

One wrong attitude or characteristic, and it makes no difference which one it happens to be, takes away the mind's ability to function logically, and therefore **that mind becomes unreliable**. The mind of a double minded man is just as wrong before God as is the mind of a covetous man or of a resentful man or of a hypocritical man or of an adulterous man. They are all equally unreliable.

So let's one more time come back to the men who have changed some of the teachings of God's Church by deliberately twisting the meanings of clear biblical statements, men who argued against the truth in order to endorse some heretical teaching. That is something that has happened on a massive scale since Mr. Armstrong died.

THOSE WHO HAVE KNOWINGLY LIED TO US

Reading that old "Unfinished Business" article forcefully raised this question in my mind: **how and why are these men not afraid of God** when they knowingly distort the Scriptures in order to get the Church to accept some false teachings? They know what they are doing when they argue against clear and correctly translated statements in the Bible. **The way** they try to discredit the clear statements that contradict their false teachings gives away that **they know better**.

Their efforts are always focused on trying to prove that a certain Scripture doesn't mean what it actually says. **They don't care what that Scripture really does mean!** Their only interest in that Scripture is that it doesn't supposedly mean what it actually says.

Here is a key for us to understand.

A negative approach to the Scriptures (i.e. seeking to prove that the Scripture in question supposedly does not mean something, as opposed to seeking to prove what that Scripture does mean) is always a give-away that the person is trying to defend an indefensible position ... and that they actually know that their position is indefensible.

Before they realize that their position is actually indefensible, they don't resort to such negative and obviously defensive reasoning. Before they realize the real problem with their own position, they will frequently and naively appeal to the truth ... **and in the process demolish their own position**. I've seen that happen a number of times, that people naively appealed to the truth to support a false teaching. They demolish their own position because the truth will demolish every heretical idea. It is **only once they realize that appealing to the truth is a fatal mistake**, that then they resort to this negative approach to the Scriptures. So here is the point:

People who resort to that negative approach towards the Scriptures are as guilty as hell! And deep-down they know it!

That negative approach of arguing against the obvious meaning of specific Scriptures is what we call "dealing deceitfully with the Scriptures". The Apostle Paul warned us against such people by stating the relevant principle.

But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, **nor handling the word of God deceitfully**; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Corinthians 4:2)

We need to realize that when people knowingly and deliberately twist and distort the meaning of clear Scriptures, to get us to accept some false teaching, then they will also lie to us in other ways. And it should tell us that such people do not have the fear of God, and that they don't really care that they themselves are heading for the lake of fire. We need to realize that **there is nothing we can do to help such people**, who derive a sick pleasure from seeing other people accept their deceitful reasoning.

In order to get us to reject the understanding about the nature of God that we came to understand while Mr. Armstrong was still alive, people brazenly lied to us. Leading ministers brazenly twisted clear Scriptures to support a pagan teaching, that God is supposedly a trinity. The Scriptures that show that God is in the process of building the Family of God were deviously misinterpreted.

The negative focus on examining the Scriptures became the norm, trying to prove that one Scripture after another supposedly doesn't mean that God is building a Family of spirit-born sons and daughters. We don't care what those Scriptures **do** mean; all we care about is that they **don't** mean what they appear to say. That's what those people were saying.

We need to beware!

When you see someone dealing deceitfully with the Scriptures, flee! When you see someone refusing to look at and respond to the evidence you place before them, refuting their false teachings, flee! When you hear someone knowingly lie about the past, to discredit either Mr. Armstrong or some proven teaching, flee! People who knowingly lie to us are never working for God. People who knowingly lie to us, to get us to accept a false teaching, have committed themselves to a course of opposition to the truth.

And if you don't flee, then they will "have pleasure" in taking you with them to their ultimate penalty.

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