

Let no man take your crown!

Since the death of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong in January 1986, Satan has leveled a tireless attack against God's Church aimed at deceiving and spiritually destroying as many of God's begotten children as possible. He has blinded the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:17) and caused the most part of the remainder of God's begotten children to be driven into a state of deep spiritual sleep (Matt. 25:5). Despite Satan's astounding success in deceiving tens of thousands of God's people in recent years, God's Work and goal will not be thwarted! Those few deep within the inner court of His temple, comprising His remnant Work, continue to be spiritually alert and perceptive to what is happening to His Church in this end-time (Matt. 16:18).

Vanity – always a problem!

Over the last two decades or so, Satan has succeeded in fragmenting God's Church into hundreds of splits and splinter groups – each a counterfeit of the one organization through which God is working and delivering Truth. A number of men who *today* lead these organizations have meanwhile appropriated various titles to themselves - including apostle, prophet, That Prophet - each giving his own interpretation as to why they feel these titles pertain to themselves! Essentially, vanity has motivated and tricked these men into exalting themselves, believing that it is their divine right to (mis)appropriate various scriptures to their end and to think that God will honor their unbiblical teachings and reckless advice which they impose on their followers! These same men also reject deeper understanding which means they are rejecting God, His voice and His revelation. They are essentially telling God they do not need Him, nor want to listen to Him, while alienating themselves and their followers from deeper Biblical understanding being given by the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. In so doing, these leaders are teaching error! This is a grave mistake and each will be held accountable!

Interestingly, as these leaders assign themselves titles and responsibilities which are not theirs to take, they manage to hoodwink, seduce and hypnotize the 'faithful' who form part of their organization. It is weird to see so many blindly and unquestionably submit to the unbiblical requests of these same physical leaders. By doing so, individuals deepen the loyalty toward a man (their physical leader), while unwittingly push God into second, third or worse place. These actions mean that so many individuals are digging themselves into a deeper spiritual hole because of a failure to *test their leaders* (Rev. 2:2), and *prove all things* that are being taught in their organizations (1 Thess. 5:21). Instead of making a stand for God and a stand for that which is right, most seem to prefer to go along with the prevailing current they find themselves in, presumably because it is easier or more convenient to do so but also because the leadership has seduced them with craftiness and cunning words (Eph. 4:14; 2 Cor. 11:13-14). Lulling God's people into this sort of complacency is possibly the number one trap which Satan uses in his effort to destroy God's Family and His Work today! It is Satan's tactic to shift people's faith in God to faith in a man! In doing so, most of God's people are shamefully refuting vital admonition given throughout the pages of the Bible. Most have carelessly brushed aside the oft repeated biblical warning to "Let *no man* deceive you"! (1 John 3:7; Eph 4:14; Eph 5:6; Mark 13:5 etc). Satan *is* a master at his job, and he won't give up!

Learning lessons from Church history

What is equally alarming is that many begotten children of God have forgotten a crucial lesson from Church history. Scriptures confirm that Church leaders in Ephesus, the first of God's seven Churches, claimed to be apostles when they were not (Rev. 2:2)! Vanity demanded that these leaders in Ephesus propelled themselves to preeminence among the people of God. These rebellious leaders administered false teachings and took it upon themselves to suspend

brethren from the fellowship of God's people for not adhering to their unbiblical teachings! Note the following scriptures, outlining this problem faced by those in the Ephesus Church:

"I wrote unto the Church, but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the *preeminence among them* receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the Church". (3 Jn. 1:9-10).

Many in the Church in Ephesus went right along with the teachings of their misguided leaders. Human nature teaches us that brethren who did this wanted to hang onto their leaders coattails and be in their 'good books' for personal physical gain – albeit temporary and irrelevant in the grand scheme of things and in God's eyes. They trusted these leaders 'in faith' – *blind faith!* Clearly, there were those in Ephesus who were not spiritually alert or perceptive enough to see what was going on in God's Church at the time! They submitted to their leaders without question or hesitation even though their leaders were evidently not following Christ but their own selfish desires and agendas. God tells us to follow a human leader only *as that leader follows Christ* (1 Cor. 11:1). *That* is God's government in action! God doesn't tell us to follow a man irrespective of what he says and does. That would be foolish (Prov. 14:7)! A true leader of God must follow Him closely and hear His voice! It is our individual responsibility to ascertain this by always keeping God in the forefront of our minds – proving all things and testing what our physical leaders teach to ensure they are following God and accepting deeper understanding! Few in Ephesus remembered this vital lesson – to watch, pray, prove, test and place their faith in God and not in a man. Notice how God praised the faithful in Ephesus who looked to Him, and not to men:

"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, *and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:* And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted...to him who overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life" (Rev. 2:2-3, 7).

Test your leaders

The faithful in Ephesus 'tried' their leaders! Strong's indicates that this means they 'tested, scrutinized, examined and proved' their leaders! This lesson in testing and examining the leadership should be learnt by all! We should all be diligently doing this today and always, ensuring we do not fall into one of Satan's more successful traps which we are here discussing. This problem we read about during the Ephesus Church is history – *our history* – and we must know it lest it repeat itself! We should all know, remember and learn from Church history so that the negative does not repeat itself in our lives! None of God's people should have any excuse!

All of God's begotten children need to be cognizant of the fact that most of the seven Church's of God throughout history went off track. Their leaders started off well, but many veered off their spiritual course (Rev. 2 & 3). Why? Because these leaders and God's people did not learn the lessons from history! To stick with God, begotten members throughout history had to constantly and continually test their leaders and prove all things to ensure that they remained with the Trunk. God pleads with us to take heed of this vital lesson and ensure that we 'try the spirits' whether they are of God or not. There are many that claim to be used by God and are not (1 John 4:1) so we should beware of this number one trap used by Satan!

Don't allow yourself to be deceived

The Bible is replete with scriptures admonishing us not to allow any man to deceive us. Let us take a look at only a few of these examples:

- "Little children, let no man deceive you" (1 John 3:7).
- "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight [*fraud*] of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph 4:14)
- "Let no man deceive you with vain words" (Eph. 5:6).
- "Take heed lest any man deceive you" (Mark 13:5).
- "Take heed that no man deceive you" (Matt. 24:4).

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). If Christ isn't leading a Church, we should be weary: "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceive not in him the lips of knowledge" (Prov. 14:7). God calls a leader 'foolish' if he refuses Biblical Truth which is brought to him! Wouldn't it follow that those who follow this type of man are also foolish?

Remember that God's Church is not stagnant, but continually grows in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). His one Church is set apart by Truth (John 17:17). The onus is on each individual to test their respective physical leaders and prove whether what they teach is Truth! We are living in serious, dangerous and urgent times! Prove where Christ is working by searching for His Truth. Above all, prove everything with the Word of God! You have nothing to lose but much to gain by testing your leaders and proving ALL things! Let no man take your crown! Remember that one of Satan's more successful traps is to deceive the leadership – that way he can easily get to you!