

Why Some Ministers Have Failed

By Herbert W. Armstrong

I was just reflecting on why some ministers have reached the top or close to the top in rank in God's Church, and then found themselves outside, many working with their hands, unqualified for any outside job, position or profession.

Two serious mistakes proved their undoing: 1) they wanted "the chief seat" for themselves and 2), they wanted to be served instead of serving. And back of both of these reasons is probably the fact, saddening and regretful as it is, they may never have been really converted in the first place. How many think that just being a "Church member" means being converted!

They say an alcoholic cannot be cured until he admits he is one. It seems to me, the longer I live and the more I see and experience of humanity, the more it seems the two most difficult things for any person is, 1) to admit he or she is in the wrong—thinking wrongly, doing wrong, actually being wrong. And 2), the most rare thing is to BELIEVE Christ—not merely believe on Christ but to believe Him—believe what He says. He is the Word—the spokesman—the revelatory thought of God. He is GOD speaking. He is God's word in person—the Bible is God's word in writing—the same identical Word. Self-professed would-be "scholars" in "Biblical research" have labored long to exalt their own ego and prove the church in error by distorting, twisting, wresting the Bible, using human reason instead of the Spirit of God, in order to relieve their inner feeling of inferiority and lift the SELF above the Church. They attempted to discredit and accuse the Church in order to lift their own vanity above it. Yet they were only using human reasoning carnally, devoid of God's Spirit.

But some wanted "the chief seat." They wanted the highest, most prestigious office. Not so much coveting money as coveting "importance" in the eyes of the brethren and other ministers.

I know well what this is, because in my early life before conversion, I was beset by this fallacy of human nature. At age 16, I became fired up with ambition. I wanted to be "a success" in life. That is, I wanted to be looked upon as "important" by important men. I wanted it so intensely I was willing to drive myself to work hard and diligently to achieve that state of "importance" in the eyes of the worldly important. But as God struck Saul down and molded him into the apostle Paul, so He struck me down economically and in self-importance to humble me and replace self-confidence and ego with FAITH and humility. Once I became merely a "SERVANT" of Christ—a mere lowly human instrument in the superior hands of the Master Potter—to allow Him to mold and shape my life HIS way, He was able to use me. For some six years I was the "tail end" and lowest of the ministers—and thought of myself only as such. Then the living Christ started the Philadelphia era of His Church through me with 19 members. But, like the grain of mustard seed it GREW at the rate of 30% per year for thirty-five years. Yet this growth was seemingly so SLOW that God never allowed me to become exalted. Like Paul, I had my "thorn in the flesh," which, like Paul I won't describe, to keep me from ever becoming exalted. I thank God for the "thorn in the flesh."

But some have apparently not been blessed with such a handicap or "thorn" to keep them humble, and so sought the chief seat as rapidly as possible. One who had a good degree of natural ability became a minister after graduation from Ambassador College. He immediately set a goal—not for humble service, but for SELF glory. He was going to become "Evangelist" rank, next to highest, by a certain year. When ordained Evangelist, he exclaimed proudly, "I MADE IT—right on schedule!" But, like some in Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed, he fell by the wayside. He no longer is in God's Church.

Others have wanted to be served, and not to serve. To serve was “beneath them.” By sheer natural ability, after graduation from Ambassador, they rose to a fairly high rank, either in the ministry or at headquarters. One would never arrive at his headquarters office until around 9:30. He would be gone to lunch by 11:30. He would return around 2:00 or 2:30, and be gone for the day by 4:00 or 4:30. But he was good at delegating his responsibilities to others. Another, a minister of Pastor rank as area coordinator, preached a sermon no more frequently than once in six weeks, leaving all that to ministers under him. He was “too busy” loafing to bother to visit or pray for the sick. But he was very strict with the ministers under him.

I was thinking of the former archangel Lucifer, the exalted Cherub. For a long time he was on the inside of God’s Kingdom, just as some have been for some time on the inside in God’s Church. Lucifer came to a very high rank. He was one of the two Cherubs whose wings overspread the very throne of God at God’s heavenly universe headquarters. Then he was given a tremendous responsibility and opportunity, being placed on the throne over the earth and a third of all the angels. But he was ambitious. He wanted the chief seat of power. He made himself not only heir to the throne of the universe and number two man under God, but he organized his “staff” of angels and conspired to dethrone God. He said, “I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above” Almighty God. “I will be” GOD. He tried to “take over” from the inside. But he was cast back down to earth, now on the OUTside. He became Satan the Devil. Now on the OUTside of God’s Kingdom, he tried to DESTROY! He got to the first man Adam through his wife. He deceived the entire world. He tried to destroy the Christ child as an infant. He tried to destroy Jesus at age thirty by the great temptation. He deceived leaders in the Church, introduced a counterfeit Christianity, tried to stamp out the true Church. He used his false church to martyr millions of saints. Even the tiny fragment remaining of the true church in the day when I first came among them had lost most of God’s biblical TRUTH.

And now Satan is trying to DESTROY God’s Philadelphia era of the Church. His “MO”—if you can’t “take over” from the inside, destroy from the outside!

But what a tragedy that some have come as Ambassador College students, graduated, became ministers, and then, after a few years, going out or being put out, find themselves unqualified for any other profession. Some have had to find employment at manual labor.

Becoming a minister of Jesus Christ is a very serious matter. To the young minister Timothy the Apostle Paul instructed to “be instant”—keep at it—in season and out of season. And Jesus said, “No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). Again, Jesus said “Remember Lot’s wife,” who turned back.

One should never start in the ministry until he is fully converted, has received and is really being led by the Holy Spirit of God—has given his life to God to be used in SERVING, not GETTING—until he has come to really admit how wrong he is and has been, and wants to serve rather than be served. It’s for LIFE—and for ETERNITY!

Saul was the tallest man in Israel, but was small in his own eyes. But when he became BIG in his own eyes God could not use him any longer. Can we allow Christ to use us effectively, bearing good fruits, and at the same time remaining small and humble in our own eyes? That is what is required.

The motive must be to GIVE—to CONTRIBUTE—to help and cooperate, and not to GET rank or power or position, or money for SELF! And we must not TAKE credit to ourselves, but GIVE God all the glory, for He will not share that with any one.

(This article was published in the “Pastor General’s Report,” dated February 19, 1982, Vol.4, No.8.)