

Senior citizen urges patience in reform of ministry

Jun 2

The letter in late March exposing the secret, evil life-style of Dean Bruer has opened the flood gates of complaints about the corruption in our ministry. Many are eager for prompt changes to be made. While legal issues must be dealt with immediately, issues of power and doctrine will unfortunately take more time. Many of our overseers are resisting any type of change to their power structure, and change can only be done after they have faced the legal system. We must first allow the judicial system to remove the abusers and those in authority who systematically covered up those abuses. Like the Canadian elder, I have chosen to remain anonymous to avoid excommunication until the current group of overseers have been cleansed or removed, as things could soon get very messy. I have realized for years that "Truth" is a mixture of God's way and man's rules, with that mixture varying from individual to individual.

The book *The Life and Ministry of Edward Cooney 1867-1960* (available free online) provides valuable history on our ministry. It was written by a convert of Cooney and is probably biased towards him, and it may be biased against the other main character, William Irvine, but I do find it very informative. In 1899 Irvine and others left their preaching in "organized religions" to form the "Go Preacher" group. By 1901 Cooney and Irvine were preaching together (workers came to US in 1903 and to Canada in 1904).

By 1907 Irvine was claiming to be the "living witness" meaning only those who professed through him or through one who had professed through Irvine could go to heaven. He was described as a dictator and a new pope. By 1914 Irvine was confronted about his weakness for women, and when asked to step aside as the leader and to remain in the ministry, he refused and left entirely. His lieutenants immediately started carving up the English-speaking world for their areas of command, using the same organizational structure that Irvine had ruled with. Cooney objected to the organizational structure and said that all should be led by God's spirit. Cooney was finally excommunicated in 1928 for refusing to be in step with the other workers. He then preached among outcasts in the English-speaking world until his death; this part of the book left me with an empty feeling that something else was wrong.

It took only 8 years for what apparently started out right to become corrupted by ego and greed. This partially corrupted ministry has now gone on for 116 years, and it will take some

time to change. God has immense patience and uses many tools, including man's legal system, to do His work.

In the weeks following the letter about Dean Bruer, multiple workers in our region preached about the "authority of the ministry", its justification and the need to maintain it. I assume those instructions came from our overseer, who rather than seeing the fallacy of pushing this authority chose instead to double down on the power structure. This current style of authority came not from God or Jesus, but from William Irvine. Matt 20:25-28 – Jesus warned against this very situation. Some overseers have been honest and spirit-led, some are now seeing the light and encouraging cleansing, and others will fight to the bitter end to maintain their control. Like others, I have professed and have been spiritually fed in an imperfect fellowship under a partially corrupt ministry. Therefore, I do not want to give this fellowship up or be forced out during this painful time of cleansing.

Even though not often used in meeting or in conversations, the key word is "control". If the workers can convince us that they are the toll-booths on our way to heaven, they can control many aspects of our lives, including where we go to meeting, who we meet with, etc. Workers cannot control my relationship with God, but they can try to control how my spouse and I appear; therefore, the shallow emphasis on form and appearance. A form is necessary when a foundation is being formed. Once the foundation has solidified (Jesus) the forms are no longer needed and are removed. Forms are only left on if there is a low confidence in the material in the foundation (man's rules).

If some workers think they can control people's salvation, it is a small step from their point of view to take advantage sexually of someone lower than them. Instead all should esteem others better than themselves; we don't go around abusing someone we esteem higher than ourselves. The current rash of sexual abuse cases stem from: 1) human nature; 2) an organizational structure that elevates the overseers and workers way above the friends; and 3) a culture of cover up that used to mean no earthly consequences. Point 3 is currently changing thanks to efforts of many, including this website. Point 2 must change and change is painful. Point 1 will never change, although a correct ministry will result in more spirit-led decisions and less decisions made by human nature.

Some friends, several workers and many overseers have a lot to lose on this earth through this cleansing process, and they will resist in many ugly ways. Let the judicial system do the heavy lifting, placing several overseers and workers behind bars. Then the remaining ones should be more receptive to discussing with the friends a spirit-led ministry as taught by Jesus. An attempt at that discussion today might be counter-productive.