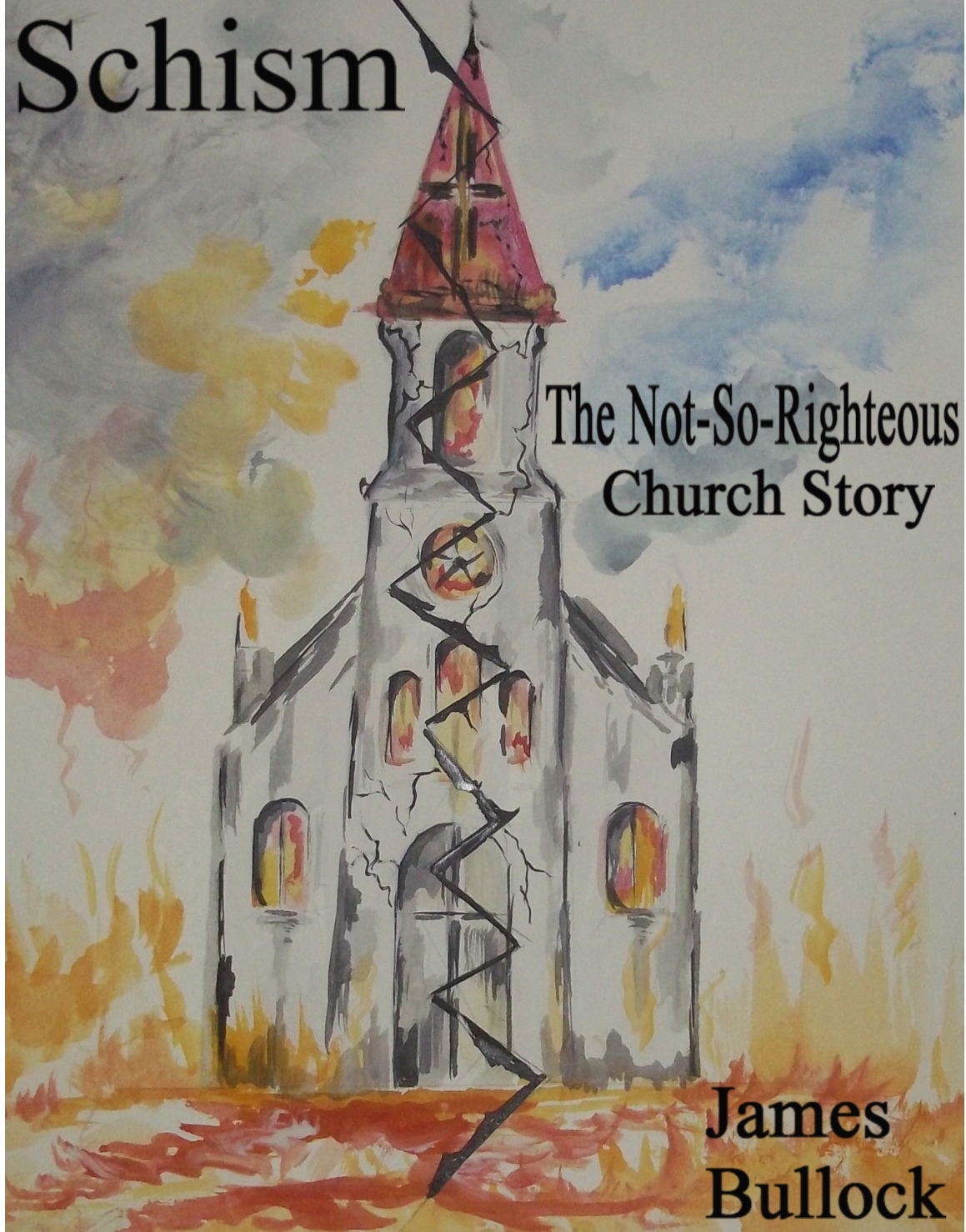


Schism



The Not-So-Righteous
Church Story

James
Bullock

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By: James Bullock

Schism: The Not-So-Righteous Church Story
Cover art and design: Vickie Bullock (vickiesart.com)

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This is a work of non-fiction. All names have been changed to protect the persons and their identities.

All praises to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ for I'm nothing without.

To my family members who are alive or have passed from this world: Your actions, words, and prayers have molded me into the person I am today – an individual who is genuinely happy for the life he has lived and looks forward to the many days ahead with a smile.

To my friends and those I look at as family: Thank you for your support when you didn't even know it. I keep a close circle, and I'm happy you are a part of my life (you know who you are).

To the reader: Thank you for taking the time out to read something that has been a huge part of my life. I truly hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did recapturing the moments.

Peace and much love to you all.

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Introduction

While one might think otherwise after reading this story in its entirety, this is a work of pure fact. These are personal accounts taken from my own written notes during various business and call meetings. All the names outside of my own have been changed or omitted to protect the privacy of every person involved. What you're about to read every other Sunday over the coming weeks and months isn't about judgment, condemnation, or name sullyng (simply because some people will be easily identified by those who know them and their positions in the church during that time no matter how I change their names). This is a warning.

This is a warning for people in church congregations who have witnessed or are going through something similar. This is for people trying to understand the power struggle that goes on between man and man under the banner of "God" in the Lord's house. So many people say this kind of stuff is happening at every church. Well, maybe this story can help change that belief by starting with one Baptist church located outside of Charlottesville, Virginia with the same name of the key town in the longtime animated show *The Simpsons*.

I don't remember my first church service. My dad has told me about my initial interaction with church, but I can't recall that moment. But there are moments I do remember about my early days in church; including sitting in the mostly dark, somewhat cold building, looking at the old stove to my right trying its hardest to heat the bodies of people doing their best to warm everyone's hearts and ears. I also remember splitting my time between both my father and mother's churches.

It wasn't until 2001 that I decided to be baptized at my father's church for several reasons - the most profound being able to enjoy my grandmother's church alongside my grandma in her waning years. And during those few remaining years between my baptism and my grandmother's passing, the church my grandma, her sisters and ancestors alike helped build was changing dramatically.

As seen in the past by members (including my dad), the power struggle between leaders of the church can cause hurt feelings, unanswered questions, and a separation between congregations - a schism, if you will.

So what started the discord that I witnessed? In all honesty, I don't exactly know. But there was a moment that opened my eyes to the fact our little church and its' leaders weren't as happy as they seemed behind the pulpit. A year and a half after my baptism, a situation over a female member's address book not being directly returned to her or someone who knew her until weeks after it was found on the church's front pew. The simple occurrence turned into a full-blown war about respect - or lack thereof - for privacy.

During a meeting after church in regards to the book and our church minister Pastor Cyrus Payton (who had only been pastor for three and a half years at that point), a former NFL athlete that Payton invited to be a part of Payton's new church home said something that would set the stage for everything that would unfold over the next several years, "Don't you (Payton) see they don't want you."

From that day on, I watched members come and go; people laughed at while crying over suicidal thoughts; individuals speaking in tongues without a translator; near fist fights in the middle of a service. And yet we stayed. We believed the church leaders would straighten out situations that were hurting the church and its' congregation. We thought God would shake things loose and open eyes to make people stand up and say, "We've had enough."

But as I found out in 2010 and 2011, there are times when the Lord puts the obligation on you to do what you think people old enough to be your parents would do in the name of justice and righteousness.

Chapter 1: The February 2010 Call Meeting

The first topic of discussion in the February Call Meeting was that Pastor Payton would not allow some programs, festivals, or celebrations to be carried on in the church. The Pastor's decision prevented Chairman of the Deacon Board Dewey "Doughy" Holly's band of worshipers from performing in the church. There was noticeable frustration coming from Deacon Holly as Pastor Payton expressed his feelings on there being no part of God in the entertainment the programs brought. Dcn. Holly bit his tongue and remained silent, letting the meeting continue without rebuttal.

Changing the topic to the church member's thoughts on the church's spiritual growth saw current Senior Choir member and former Church Secretary Bertha Cooke speak for nearly five minutes on how the people weren't showing the love needed to make our church thrive. Bertha predicted that certain members who believed they are going to heaven really aren't!

Deacon Holly jumped out of his seat and use Cooke's words to talk about something that had bothered him for a while, "I just don't understand how we keep bringing in new members, but once they're baptized, they leave."

Chairman of the Pastor's Aide Amos "Baritone" Macklin tried to sooth Dcn. Holly's confused mind on such an important problem.

Macklin stated that he believed newcomers didn't know who was really leading the church and, "How can you walk the line if you can't lead yourself?"

Several people gave "Baritone" a standing ovation over his bold words until Deacon Samuel Travis reminded Amos that Macklin didn't come to church when Pastor Payton can't attend.

Rather than defend his actions, Macklin calmly replied, "I know that's right," before taking his seat - not saying a word for the rest of the meeting.

Things were starting to take a turn for the worst when Pastor Payton said that God had given him the Word to preach to us like adults, but we were still unable to move past simple matters like this meeting.

Deacon Roscoe Calhoun took offence to Payton's claims from seconds ago, asking Pastor Payton, "Do you really judge us like that? And don't lie and say you don't."

Dcn. Calhoun believed that Pastor Payton was not being honest with himself when he judged the congregation according to the Word that God had given Payton. A slight stomp was heard coming from Dcn. Calhoun when he sat down following Payton's declaration.

Dcn. Holly returned to a standing position to reemphasize his disagreement with Pastor Payton over the allowance of programs, festivals & celebrations in the church. According to Dcn. Holly, Pastor Payton put a stop to a church program Holly and his band hoped to play in the church over a year and a half ago.

Since that day, Holly saw Payton in a different light and verbally admonished Payton in front of us, "You have authority, but not *that* kind of authority!"

Bertha Cooke hated hearing people of God bickering over petty things like programs; asking us to show love to not only each other, but also other churches. Then Cooke took things to another level by saying the Holy Spirit had shaken her during the previous night (something that occurred in the past with Mrs. Cooke), and demanded she write down what the Spirit told her. Cooke retrieved a folded note from her right pant pocket, squinting her eyes in an effort to read her writing. I, like most people I talked to after the meeting, had no idea what the incomplete, seemingly misspelled or misread words Cooke read meant.

When Cooke took her seat, Pastor Payton had a statement for the pro-program members, "Programs will ruin (this church). They'll become bondage tools used by Satan. But I'll let you have whatever you want to have. Before you answer yes or no, think about this: Before or after I came here, how much have programs helped the church ... spiritually?"

Silence spread throughout the room when this spiritual bomb was dropped.

After several awkward seconds of quiet, Dcn. Holly audibly disagreed with Payton's assessment about church programs being tools of the Devil's bondage. In Dcn. Holly's mind, the entertainment his band would've provided celebrated God. For the first

time since the meeting began, Payton appeared disappointed, shaking his head in a “no” fashion as everyone reentered their seats.

As the meeting returned to the agenda, Sister Bertha leapt out of her seat, shaking as if she had been electrocuted. According to the trembling, sweating Mrs. Cooke, the Holy Spirit was moving through her right here, right now! Through the Holy Spirit, Bertha blamed the deacons for the Youth Wednesday Nights destruction because no deacon would attend.

No response from the Deacon Board allowed Bertha to continue her Spiritual, verbal assault with her fists pointed at her targets, “You better drop whatever you holdin’ against Pastor Payton ‘cause we ain’t gonna get nowhere! And Pastor, I don’t wanna hear you sayin’ nothin’ bad about the Deacon Board! And I better not hear any of you talkin’ bad about Pastor! Let me hear it! Let me hear it! I’ve heard things, and it’s not of God!”

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We were almost three hours into the meeting when Pastor Payton recounted what happened during the Christmas season, “I called each of the deacons during Christmas. None of them really wanted to carry a conversation with me. I’ve tried to communicate with the deacons, but they won’t try in return.”

Deacon Dewey Holly vocalized his view of the communication breakdown between Pastor Cyrus Payton and the Deacon Board, “The fact is that the deacons have wanted to meet with Pastor Payton, but only have had one real meeting in the past one

and a half to two years. I just feel that the relationship between myself and Pastor has changed since I became Chairman of the Deacon Board; and don't understand why."

Pastor Payton knew exactly what meeting Dcn. Holly was referring to.

According to Pastor Payton, the 2008 meeting Dcn. Holly was talking about went downhill fast, "It was a tragedy and a complete attack on me. The one thing that hurt me the most was Deacon Holly telling me, 'I have lost all respect for you.'"

"I didn't say I had no respect for you," Dcn Holly hastily retorted with Vice-Chairman of the Deacon Board Roscoe Calhoun playing cheerleader in favor of his fellow deacon. "I told you, 'Don't make me lose respect for you.'"

After Deacon Bill "Asphalt" Richards brought up the subject of rumors being spread about him between church members to Pastor Payton and his wife, Dcn. Richards and Deacon Carlton Stevens agreed that, "...the church is movin' nowhere."

Dcn. Holly stood in agreement with his fellow deacons while questioning Pastor Payton over the fact that Payton didn't send those same gossipers to Holly, Richards, or whomever they are talking about to straighten possible situations out.

I raised my hand, gaining the attention of Pastor Payton so I could speak, "Deacon Holly, you brought up the fact that people don't show you proper respect by not confronting you when they hear something about you. Earlier, (Holly) said that we need to confront the people that have wronged us and explain ourselves, and what we've heard. But you haven't done that because you're still talking about it in a manner that suggests you haven't made any resolution between yourself and the people who are talking about you behind your back.

"If you know the source of the negativity, you should've confronted them instead of holding it in your heart. Pastor Payton [now turning in his direction to the right of the Deacon Board], it was up to you to settle the matter between the person and Deacon Richards if you have someone coming up to you instead of Deacon Richards. Rather than being the man to run and tell Deacon Richards what this person said, you should've called a meeting with Deacon Richards and the person to straighten this stuff out instead of allowing it to go on."

Neither Pastor Payton nor Dcn. Holly had a rebuttal for my comments. Church Secretary Caroline Bower and Juanita Greene both agreed with my sentiments as Dcn.

Holly and Pastor Payton sat with stone faces. Deacon Samuel Travis abruptly spoke up again, blaming the lack of respect for the Deacon Board started with Pastor Payton making decisions without the deacons' approval. Travis also said that Pastor Payton allowed the people to talk to him about church decisions instead of directing those individuals or groups to the deacons for a collective assessment. Like Dcn. Travis' suddenness to speak, Pastor Payton stated that this part of the meeting needed to end now because it had gone on far too long.

Dana Carey - who was responsible for the church taxes - took everyone's attention off of the Deacon Board and Pastor Payton by asking how a meeting could be held regarding the use of 1099 and W9 tax forms without her knowledge. A three-way argument between Carey and Trustees Sinclair Millard and Ronald Brooks saw Trustee Brooks reveal that they had received an application to replace Dana Carey as the church's tax worker.

The stunned look on Carey's face was only matched by her follow up comment, "So they have someone ready to replace me, and I didn't know about it."

Chairman of the Trustee Board Millard told Carey after her distressed statement, "It wouldn't be so bad if you weren't getting paid for every 1099 form you fill out. We've had that happen before when Ruth Sanford was doing the same thing you're doing; and the money didn't turn out right."

"So I'm just like her in your eyes?" Carey said, becoming even more upset than before.

Pastor Payton tried to settle matters and clarify what Trustee Millard meant, but Carey refused to let her good name be sullied, declaring, "I have never taken money to do this job. And I won't until I'm gone."

The Men's Ministry was reborn at the end of 2008, only to falter out less than a year later. According to Deacon Samuel Travis, this coming together of men that was meant to inspire and help grow the church's males insulted the Deacon Board because Pastor Payton, reportedly, didn't want anyone other than the "young people" to head this ministry. To make matters worse, it was also rumored that Payton gave whoever headed that month's Men's Ministry meeting their subject and everything they had to say.

My father disputed these bogus claims as he was one half of the last Men's Ministry service in August of 2009 alongside myself.

I also joined my father to correct this falsehood that Pastor Payton was behind our presentation, "Pastor Payton never told myself or my father what to say, do, or even what the topic should be. Pastor Payton just approved our topic, and gave us a couple of scriptures that he thought would help it."

Associate Minister Zachary Toliver echoed my sentiments, straightening out a fallacy in front of everyone.

With the discrepancy over the Men's Ministry settled, Deacon Roscoe Calhoun wanted to know what, who, and why Pastor Payton took it upon himself to assign armor bearers, "I have a question for you, Pastor Payton: What is an armor bearer? And who are the armor bearers?"

Before Pastor Payton could answer Dcn. Calhoun's question, Dcn. Calhoun yelled, "Who are the armor bearers?"

Pastor Payton replied, "'Baritone' (Amos Macklin), Zachary, Albert ('Tiny' Albert Coleman), Herbert Jacobs,"

Taking Dcn. Calhoun's spot was Dcn. Travis to get an answer to, "Why do the armor bearers get to come up with you instead of the deacons?"

Pastor Payton informed everyone, "Well, the deacons *used* to come up during Altar Call (a congregational prayer moment that occurs after the sermon)."

Zachary Toliver defended himself by stating that he and the rest of Payton's Armor Bearers only took the deacons' spots in front of the altar during Alter Call simply because the deacons would leave before Altar Call.

Having another question needing answering, Deacon Calhoun asked Pastor Payton, "So why do (the Armor Bearers) have to stand in (Pastor Payton's) room when you (Pastor Payton) and the deacons have our meeting before service?"

Toliver responded instead of Payton, "If you felt I shouldn't have been in there, you could've told me. Out of respect for you, I'd left."

Dcn. Calhoun rolled his eyes as he said, "That's not what I was sayin' at all."

A majority of the room informed Dcn. Calhoun that is exactly what he was saying.

For a couple of moments following Deacon Calhoun's argument against the Armor Bearer, I thought if it was time to ask my next question.

With the clock showing two in the afternoon, I took my stand to verbalize the query running through my mind, "I'll keep this short because everyone is ready to go. Pastor Payton, you alluded to earlier that there's a power struggle going on between yourself and the deacons. Well, have you spoken to the deacon or deacons that you feel is/are responsible for this? And if you have, what deacon or deacons need to be removed? And to the deacons - do you feel Pastor Payton has overstepped his boundaries by not allowing you all to have a say in the church. I just want to know what can be done to get this church in order. Do we have to get rid of some deacons? Do we have to get rid of the pastor? What can be done to fix this mess?"

Pastor Payton looked at me with a stoic expression to answer my question of whether or not the church would benefit if we got rid of either himself - Payton - and/or a member/members of the Deacon Board, "I can answer that in two words: Effective communication."

Our pastor went on to tell us that he would put his best foot forward to fix the communication breakdown between the parties involved. Everyone cheered for Payton following his positive speech. Well, mostly everyone. Another person with words for Pastor Payton was Charlotte Travis - Deacon Samuel Travis' wife.

Sister Travis expressed her God-given growth and humbleness over the past year and was proud to hear the Word from Pastor Payton, but felt Payton's overlying messages had become so negative, "In the current world we're living in, coming to church shouldn't make you feel bad."

Sadly for Sis. Travis, Pastor Payton didn't give her statement a response. Instead, Pastor Payton asked if anyone else had something to say. Lucille Lyles spoke up in regards to a comment Pastor Payton made about people not being able to pray shouldn't be praying in front of a congregation. For some reason, the dull-faced Payton couldn't remember saying anything like that. Unfortunately for our forgetful minister, there was someone who did remember Pastor Payton saying what Lyles referred to - me.

My hand shot up so I could verbally recount what happened that day, “Yeah, I remember when you said that. I’m sorry, but I can’t lie. You said it, straight up. And you said it after Brother Deacon Richards had done his prayer.”

A collective groan ran through the room as Dcn. Richards’ head dropped toward his chest.

Deacon Calhoun patted Richards on the shoulder while mumbling, “That ain’t right.”

For the first time in a while, Pastor Payton seemed concerned; stating that he either misspoke or we misinterpreted his words.

Moving to the next person with his hand up - Chairman of the Trustee Board Sinclair Millard - Pastor Payton changed the topic thinking everyone would forget about him stating people who aren’t ready to pray before the congregation shouldn’t. Instead of directing his question to Pastor or the Deacon Board, Trustee Millard spoke at Dana Carey again by stating she shouldn’t have the positions she had at that time (being in charge of the church’s taxes). Everyone felt this was a step backwards, causing Pastor Payton to move on. But Trustee Millard wasn’t done; he was only biding his time.

Chairman of the Deacon Board Dewey Holly wanted to tell us something real quick, “You know, I’ve seen a lot of things over the past few years. Since I’ve become a deacon, I’ve seen things you wouldn’t believe. You all can’t comprehend what I’ve seen because you’re just looking in the physical. I’m looking at everything in the spiritual.”

With the meeting finally coming to a close, Tr. Millard decided it was time to go for broke. Tr. Millard returned to a standing position to declare his disgust over the favoritism shown for the sick.

Tr. Millard informed Pastor Payton that he knew no one put Millard or his family’s names on the church bulletin’s Sick List when Millard’s sister was ill and Tr. Millard was about to have surgery.

“But when Dcn. Holly came back, you all prayed for him,” Trustee Millard said. “You thanked God for him when he came back to church. But you never prayed for me.”

Tr. Millard shook with passion and emotion as he bellowed out, “Pastor Payton ... why can’t my name be called?”

Everyone started laughing over Millard's comment. Pastor Payton went on the offensive, bringing up the fact that no one knew Millard was getting surgery and Miller should've told someone so they could put it on the church bulletin's prayer list. With that Pastor Payton called for an end to this extended call meeting. Before we could get to our closing prayer, Deacon Roscoe Calhoun demanded all of us read and meditate on John 13:35. Pastor Payton made sure to put Millard's name on the Throne of Grace during the closing prayer at 2:40 p.m.

Chapter 2: The Letter

As expected following the February Call Meeting, problems were still brewing in the church. Now, more and more members were complaining about not just the lack of cohesion between Pastor Payton and the Deacon Board, but also the summary sheets handed out during Business Meetings wasn't adding. After making my feelings known to those in charge of handling the money, I started leaving notes on the offering envelopes that included as much as a penny. On the 1st Sunday in September - the beginning of the church's Revival week - I put something different in the offering envelope. On that day, when they opened that sealed piece of paper, they found a letter that was put on my heart to write; a letter that was the easiest, yet hardest thing I'd ever written up to that point. This is "The Letter."

"I don't think it's a coincidence that this piece of paper is being placed in an envelope, and into the offering basket on 1st Sunday in September. Honestly, I can't think of a better coincidence if there was one. This day used to be the biggest day on the (church) calendar. It was a day that my grandmother and many others held dear. They put their hearts, souls, spirits, and everything God had blessed them with to make each year just as, if not more so special than the year before. But this year, I've been blessed with the idea that instead of giving money as my offering, I offer my feelings. Not just my feelings on this day, but also my feelings of disappointment that the church I once held so dear has become a shell of its former self, with people lying to themselves and everyone else that (the church) is growing in a positive light. I'll say it right here, and if you ask me, I'll tell you the same: it's a boldface lie!

"I know a lot of talk is going around about my recent notes on the back of these very same offering envelopes. Understand that I didn't do that to start talk about me. The same reason I wrote those is the same reason I wrote this: the truth. Lately, every time I

tell someone (near the area or closer to my home in Richmond) that I go to (this church), they look at me like some kind of fool. Usually, their follow up question goes something like this, “I’ve heard a lot about (that church). They don’t do right with their money, do they?”

“It’s one thing to hear that question once or twice, but to constantly hear it is proof enough that something isn’t right. Add that to the fact that anytime someone brings up the money issues (numbers not adding up right, mysterious pay roll deductions, etc.), people are shot down, and told to keep their mouths shut. Where there’s smoke, there’s fire, and people want to know where the “rumors” are coming from and why. Why shut them down when they want to know what’s right and wrong in the church, and maybe even prevent any more wrongs from happening? But I can’t speak for them; I can only speak for myself.

“And what I can say for myself is I can’t wholeheartedly delude myself any longer, and hope that the money I give to God is used properly here. I’ll give my money to a non-profit organization, or a homeless person on the street before I turn it over to a church that’s not using their given funds as Jehovah intended.

“I also can say that I know there are talks about finding out who is responsible for some ‘Anti-tithe organization/agenda’. I’ll say this with my hand on the Bible that the only person I know of doing this is myself. I don’t stand with anyone, or ask anyone to back me outside of God. If people see my feelings, and feel the same enough to follow what I’m writing, well so be it. But I urge each and every member to give back to the Lord in his or her own way. As long as that money goes to help someone or something in a positive way, you are giving your tithe. You give your best; you’re honoring the Lord. I highly doubt the members of (the church) are sitting on \$10,000,000 as one guest preacher noted a few weeks back, but I know we have something to give.

“Don’t give out of habit, but out of love for your fellow man. The only agenda I have is to return (the church) back to the church I enjoyed going to. I want the church that uplifted you, and people weren’t backstabbing each other for a meaningless church title. I want (the church) to have a fearless group of leaders and members who stand up when they know something is wrong. I want the fear of God back in (the church)!

“I know a couple of months back, a letter was written that got some talk, but no real details were given outside of those in the inner core of the church. You know - the existing, non-existent clique that everyone laughed about when Pastor Payton said, “There are no cliques in (the church),” earlier this year.

“Well, I want whoever is reading this, and whoever reads this to let it be known. This letter isn’t given in secrecy. If you want to see it, ask me, and I’ll give it to you. This letter is the warning. The people of (the church), the real members who actually care about the health of this church are too afraid to stand up and voice their anger because they feel the numbers are too great. Instead of voicing their hurt, they walk away. I don’t care about numbers because Jehovah being #1 is the only number that matters. If you read this, and feel the same way I do, show it.

“Make a copy of this letter, and stuff it in every offering envelope you use until we get (the church) back to the church it was; when people weren’t ashamed to have their name associated with this church. When this church stood as a meeting place between man and God. To know where every penny we give goes, and that it’s being used properly. That’s what I want, and I know a lot of others want it, too. But it won’t happen unless you stand up and follow the example of Jesus Christ. He rebelled and fought the establishment that supposedly stood by the law of the Lord. Jesus kicked out the moneychangers in his Father’s temple. Don’t let your disappointment steal your love of Jesus and his sanctuary.

“I want you to know that I write this letter in the love of Jesus Christ. I have no ill will for any member in (the church). I can disagree with you and still hug you because each and every one of you is a family member in Christ. This is not a disrespectful shot at Pastor Payton, his family, the deacons, their families, or anyone else. With God’s help, I just want to bring the real (church) back. I don’t want my belief that Jehovah will make an example of out of our church like He’s done to so many other churches become (the church’s) reality.”

No less than two hours later did I hear from Trustee Allen White about “The Letter”, and how the Trustee Board would have a, “retaliation,” for me. Two weeks later, Deacon Bill “Asphalt” Richards confronted me about “The Letter” to ask what my true intentions were. I explained myself and he expressed his similar feelings. But what would become a recurring theme during this journey, I asked Deacon Richards his opinion on what needed to be done to make our mutual dreams a reality.

Dcn. Richards shook his head as he said, “There’s more stuff goin’ on that most don’t even know about.”

On the fifth Sunday of October 2010, I was able to have my own Call Meeting to read “The Letter” and let anyone who had questions for me ask. I stood in front of the congregation, my family, the Deacon Board, the Trustee Board, Pastor Payton and his family for an hour and a half, giving my feelings, answering questions about what I would do if I could change the church while letting people who wanted to make a change voice their opinions and solutions.

By the end of my Call Meeting, it was revealed that a few church members had confronted the Financial Committee with the same concerns I had, but weren’t allowed to join the committee as Deacon Dewey Holly suggested people concerned over the church finances should do. Shortly after my Call Meeting, dates for the Finance Committee meetings started changing, yet no one new was allowed to join the committee.

Chapter 3: The December 2010 Call Meeting

Following the fallout of “The Letter” and a lack of progress concerning the church’s health, good name, and the church leaders’ inability to work together, the Deacon Board decided another call meeting needed to happen on the first Saturday in December.

Chairman of the Deacon Board Dewey “Doughy” Holly was the first to speak - stating that he was so disgruntled over the last Call Meeting that he demanded Pastor Cyrus Payton and the Deacon Board set up another meeting. According to Dcn. Holly, nothing was accomplished in the eight months since the last meeting in regards to the pastor’s relationship with the Deacon Board. Dcn. Holly revealed that the deacons and Pastor Payton had a sit-down conversation last week and witnessed the same problems in that meeting that they had during previous conversations.

Deacon Samuel Travis expressed his belief that there’s no fellowship between the deacons and Pastor Payton because the pastor only wanted to hold meetings after service - something against the deacons’ wishes.

Dcn. Travis felt that Pastor Payton was also responsible for the church’s attendance dropping off in recent years, “...because it starts at the top!”

Travis’ next statement summed up his feelings, “It’s a team effort. Without that team effort, nothing’s gonna happen!”

The Deacon Board’s verbal unity was echoing out when Deacon Roscoe Calhoun stood up and proclaimed every miscommunication between themselves and Pastor Payton in previous meetings was due to that lack of time and fellowship. Not only that, but Dcn. Calhoun wanted to know what Pastor Payton’s true vision was for the church.

Rather than let Pastor Payton tell us he vision for the church then, Dcn. Calhoun continued by bringing up a recent sermon that Payton preached where Dcn. Calhoun, “... saw the flesh rise in Payton.”

Like his fellow deacon, Dcn. Calhoun tried to summarize his feelings in a single statement, “Is we on Jesus’ side?”

Dcn. Calhoun, rather than stop there, gave his spiritual rendition of The Temptations’ *Ball of Confusion*, “Look at us. We goin’ round and round. We don’t know where the world’s headed. We don’t even know where the church’s headed! It’s just a ball of confusion. That’s what the world is today. Just a big ball of confusion!”

Stomping his right foot, Dcn. Calhoun declared, “If Pastor ain’t doin’ right, we need to come together against him. Just so y’all know - this call meeting ain’t for the deacons. There’s a whole lotta Hell in (the church). And I just pray that God gets the glory when all of this gets right.”

Likewise, Deacon Carlton Stevens said that the deacons’ words are of truth and justice.

Deacon Bill “Asphalt” Richards was the last to speak for the Deacon Board. Dcn. Richards talked about his visions of what a deacon does (mentoring, studying under the pastor, being looked upon as a community leader) being dashed when he became a deacon, “I haven’t learned a thing.”

Dcn. Stevens - like his fellow deacons - wanted a relationship between himself and his pastor, but also needed Pastor Payton to know that our (the congregation’s) salvation is in Payton’s hands.

Pastor Cyrus Payton stood up with a slight grin on his face to tell everyone that being (in the church) for ten years and hearing there’s no relationship between himself and the Deacon Board makes him question what the “relationship” really was when everything seemed okay. Speaking of relationships - Pastor Payton wanted to know what the relationships between the deacons and past pastors were like, “Were those fake relationships, too?”

In response to Deacon Bill Richards about his lack of growth in God, Pastor Payton informed us that between 1999 and 2001 Pastor Payton set up seminars and sessions to properly train the deacons, “Yet when the time came for them to go, they found themselves too busy even though they promised to go a week before the seminars.”

Pastor Payton wanted the Deacon Board to know that the congregation’s salvation is in the hands of every church leader - deacons included. Pastor Payton also had an

answer for Deacon Calhoun about Payton's vision for the church, "Unity. That's what this church is striving for through prayer and the Word." Regarding the meetings happening after service, Pastor Payton only did what he could do without complicating his work schedule.

Pastor made sure everyone knew, "I'm not going to lose my job for (this church)."

Pastor Payton kept answering every accusation and question thrown at him - including how three of the five deacons refused to attend a recent dinner with Payton's family when they promised they'd make it a week ahead of time. When Pastor Payton seemed to be done, he proclaimed that a jezebel spirit was in the church.

During Pastor Payton's question & answer session, Deacon Dewey Holly audibly remarked, "This is what I mean about (Payton's) 'dictatorship' style."

Pastor Payton ignored Dcn. Holly's comment, moving from his position behind the podium to the right of the Deacon Board's table.

Pastor Payton asked as he walked toward the deacons' table, "Do you want a man of God or not?"

Moving from one deacon to the next, Pastor Payton asked each deacon if they wanted a real relationship with their pastor.

When Pastor Payton asked Deacon Roscoe Calhoun the question, Dcn. Calhoun retorted, "Do you?"

Sitting across from myself was Deacon Samuel Travis' wife Charlotte Travis with a frustrated look on her face. Suddenly rising, Sister Travis told Pastor Cyrus Payton that he should be ashamed of himself for preaching so many condemning sermons that made the Deacon Board look like the cause of the church's problems. To make matters worse, Sis. Travis voiced her belief that Pastor Payton is playing with God by smirking at certain moments of this meeting thus far. Sis. Payton couldn't understand how a "man of God" could listen to rumors about people, but never bring those same rumors to a close. To answer Pastor Payton's earlier question about the Deacon Board's relationship with previous pastors, Sis. Travis noted that those past relationships were great, "And when preachers knew it was time to step down, they did."

Finally giving Pastor Payton a chance to defend himself, Pastor Payton reminded Sis. Travis that she was one of the people who approached himself and Mrs. Payton with stories and rumors.

Starting to shake in anger, Sis. Travis stomped as she demanded Pastor Payton take back the false claims of her spreading rumors.

Pastor Payton saying, “Liar!” shocked Sis. Travis even more.

In disbelief, Sis. Travis looked around, asking, “Did he just call me a liar?”

When the people around Sis. Travis informed her Pastor Payton did call her a liar, she yelled at her pastor, “You should.... You know you shouldn’t be playin’ wit’ God! Pastor Payton, if you.... Pastor Payton, God gonna strike you dead right here for lyin’ like that!”

Sister Juanita Greene tried to convince Sis. Travis to take back her words, but she verbally refused, “No, no, that’s what’s gonna happen if he keep playin’ wit’ God!”

Sis. Travis finally took her seat while mumbling to everyone around her, “I can’t believe he called me a liar.”

Pastor Payton excused Sis. Travis’ anger before changing topics to the act of communion being tainted by the deacons performing the ritual with grudges in their hearts.

When Deacon Bill Richards asked why Pastor Payton would take this “tainted” communion with them, Pastor Payton answered, “I don’t have any issues with anyone.”

Refusing to stay on topic, deacons Dewey Holly, Bill Richards, and Roscoe Calhoun kept repeating themselves about the church’s “issues” being seen by everyone, but no one doing anything to rectify these problems. Lumpy, Dickey, and Roger kept talking about SBC’s “issues” that everyone apparently sees, but don’t know what they are.

My frustration over these “issues” and “stuff that’s goin’ on” became vocalized - bringing eyes in my direction.

I took my stand and said, “What are these ‘issues’? I guarantee you if everyone said what they’re talking about - lay everything out on the table - we’d find some resolution.”

Deacon Dewey Holly expressed his belief that we'd find a resolution in the church's problems if we followed the agenda.

Instead of sitting down, I said, "Forget about the agenda! Putting everything out there is the only way we'll solve anything. If not, this meeting is going to end up just like the last one."

Dcn. Holly declared this meeting would solve some of these "issues" while I refuted otherwise by the way this meeting was all ready playing out.

Seemingly, my words about putting everything out in the open got to Deacon Dewey Holly before he said, "You know what? If you all want to open the door, well lets just let everyone in."

After throwing his written agenda down, Dcn. Holly said one of the biggest issues in the church was Mrs. Cyrus Payton running up and down the aisle during sermons and giving her own mini-sermons about how we should work together and why the young women should dress with dignity.

Sister Lily Walker disagreed with Dcn. Holly about his thoughts on Mrs. Payton.

Dcn. Holly somewhat backtracked on his feelings by stating, "I never said she shouldn't stop. I think that's Pastor Payton's job to stop her."

Someone noted that a nearby church also had a lot of people running the aisles just like Mrs. Payton, "...and no one condemns them."

Dcn. Holly replied with a smirk on his face, "(That church) has problems of its own."

Dcn. Calhoun's daughter also liked Mrs. Payton's speeches. Sister Teresa Watley stood up to echo my sentiments about trying to get some solutions before this meeting becomes just like the last one. Taking a step back, Sis. Watley informed the Deacon Board that Pastor Payton was not the reason people didn't stay around, but the lifestyles of current members. From across the room agreed Brother Amos Macklin.

Keeping the momentum was Sister Juanita Greene declaring her anger for Pastor Payton and Roscoe Calhoun in making her apologize for the near-fistfight she had with another member during a church service over two years ago, and Pastor Payton claiming there's Hell in the choir she's a part of.

Pastor Payton reiterated Sis. Greene's statement that was true by repeating himself in front of everyone, "There's Hell up in the choir."

Pastor Payton said he had watched the choir and their lack of communication and attacks on Sister Valentine Moore - the choir leader - attributing it to negativity only Hell and the Devil could bring. Pastor Payton wanted everyone to understand the power of prophecy, and ignoring a person while the prophetic word is coming forth would prove detrimental (as with the choir/Hell statement).

After Sister Freda Watson questioned why Pastor Payton would verbally condemn the church to Hell with his words and sermons, Pastor Payton told her and everyone else that we don't understand what he's going through, "I deal with spiritual warfare on a daily basis. In comparison to you all, I'm on another level of warfare because I'm fighting spirits not only hindering myself, but also the church. And looking at the way this meeting is turning out, I can see this is nothing more than a meeting of evil."

Pastor Payton went on to talk about how he's not preaching for us, but to us, "And if you don't like it, good. Because the Word is a two-edge sword and is cutting those who don't like what they're hearing."

Pastor Payton wanted everyone to know that his leadership style is that of Jesus himself. Upon hearing Payton's words in defense of his leadership skills, Sister Bertha Cooke dropped her head in disbelief as Deacon Carlton Stevens sighed - making his first sound since his opening speech nearly two hours ago.

Dcn. Holly returned to a vertical position to say that Pastor Payton's style isn't that of Jesus because all he did was pick whom he wanted for the positions that Payton saw fit.

Dcn. Holly felt Payton's style was absolutely wrong, "And I won't stand for anything that's wrong."

Sister Bertha Cooke - who sat directly across from me during this meeting - stood up to give her opinion of Mrs. Abigail Payton Pastor Payton's wife. According to Sis. Cooke, members of other churches told her shortly after Pastor Payton became the church's pastor that Mrs. Payton ran the aisles like a mad woman. Sis. Cooke didn't believe those gossipers until she saw the actions of Mrs. Payton for herself.

But a spirit from Mrs. Payton attached itself to Sis. Cooke as she explained, “I prayed because I like Abigail. But God showed me that I only like her because of a physical attraction, not a spiritual attraction. No matter what I thought, God showed me what Abigail is doin’ is wrong. God showed me through old members who come up to me and tell me that Abigail is the reason they don’t come no more.”

Sis. Cooke also had qualms with Pastor Payton in regards to a personal e-mail she sent Pastor Payton that he read out to the congregation. The only reason Sis. Cooke felt Pastor Payton would do something like expose a personal conversation between the two was his, “...rebellious spirit.”

Pastor Payton immediately explained that the only reason he read the e-mail was to make everyone know that he’s not going to let anyone dictate him except the Lord.

Sis. Cooke disagreed with Pastor’s claim that he’s one with God, “You ain’t preacin’ the scripture. You ain’t givin’ us the Word like it’s supposed to be. I know I need to be fed, and you aren’t doin’ that. A lot of people feel this way and that’s why they left.”

Instead of raising his hand and waiting for his turn, Brother Melvin Adams stood up with a bold declaration, “I’m next!”

Bro. Adams ignored the slight laughter that occurred after his standing to tell Teresa Whatley that she and others like her should base their religion on their own relationship with God, not the adults of the church after she claimed people left the church after finding out about other church member’s ungodly lifestyles. Sis. Whatley made sure Bro. Adams understood what she meant and how her request was for the adults and leaders of the church to look at themselves before questioning why the youth won’t come to church.

Throwing his hands up, Bro. Adams declared, “This is the worst church in the world with all these problems going on.”

Deacon Roscoe Calhoun’s daughter expressed her appreciation for Pastor Payton’s sermons, but not the way Mrs. Payton conducted herself by wearing black when performing the communion ceremony.

My father took a stand to defend Mrs. Payton and ask for us not to talk about here while she's not here to defend herself, "...especially when I've seen a lot of you do worse during services."

My father also declared that, "If we don't straighten out these issues today, we might as well not even take communion tomorrow."

The comment my father made seemingly irritated Sis. Cooke as she started shaking her head in disgust while saying he doesn't even know what he's talking about by only coming to church once or twice a month.

Sis. Harriet Millard – Trustee Sinclair Millard's wife - questioned Pastor Payton about allowing Mrs. Payton to be involved in the committee meetings, Payton's lack appreciation for Baptist churches, Pastor's lack of love for everyone, and his disregarding the past.

Trustee Millard stood up when his wife sat down to agree with her, and admit he'd been hurt by the Pastor not showing compassion to him when he was sick a while back. Tr. Millard told a story about his family being in the hospital and another pastor visited them instead of Pastor Payton. In Tr. Millard's opinion, Pastor Payton's style of leadership was hurting the church.

And more importantly, Tr. Millard didn't take appreciate the usage of armor bearers when they have deacons ready to work, "We need to get rid of the armor bearers and use the deacons! But the deacons also need to understand that people don't wanna hear the deacons hollering and doing extra-long prayers; taking up time from the service."

After complementing his wife for calling out Pastor Cyrus Payton on his unrighteous ways, Deacon Samuel Travis voiced his displeasure about the church's attendance dropping off; blaming the Payton family was the cause. Dcn. Travis claimed Mrs. Payton speeches about how women dressed made a lot of women leave.

Dcn. Travis even quoted a former, unidentified deacon who said Pastor Payton was okay, "...but that wife is destruction."

Dcn. Travis had a piece of paper with some information he'd like to reveal. Dcn. Travis' paper was of research the church gathered during their investigation period of Pastor Payton. According to Pastor Payton's teacher - Bishop Campbell - Payton was a

charismatic showman that tried to turn Campbell's congregation against him when Payton felt it was time to take over Campbell's church. Dcn. Travis continued, stating that Pastor Payton ran off to do prison ministries before dubbing himself "Elder Payton" so he could begin his "own religion."

When the "Elder Payton" idea failed, Payton returned to his original church while waiting, "...for that call from (this church)," as Dcn. Travis put it.

As Dcn. Travis concluded his statement, I stood up to ask who'd heard the contents of Dcn. Travis' letter before. Most of the older members raised their hands to confirm they had.

Stunned by this information, I had to wonder out loud, "If all of you knew about his past, and what kind of person he is/was, then what does that say about you for voting him in?"

Dcn. Travis smiled before exclaiming, "Exactly!"

Seeing the confused look on my face about him agreeing with my question, Dcn. Travis explained himself, "It was out of the kindness of our hearts that we gave him a chance."

Dcn. Travis went on a long tirade about how good people the church members were to allow Cyrus Payton to become pastor after attaining such disparaging information. Still standing to ask my next question, I waited until Dcn. Travis noticed I had something else to say.

While focusing on Dcn. Travis, I said, "In that letter you read is a person that's corrupt and power hungry. Did you all see any of those characteristics in him then and are they still there, or has Pastor Payton gotten better as a person since you learned of his past?"

Dcn. Travis seemed a little startled by my inquiry and decided to audibly opt out, "Since I can't speak for everyone, and I can't judge anyone ... I won't answer your question."

To get an answer out of Dcn. Travis, I rephrased my question, "Well then, for you, Deacon Travis, did you see any of those characteristics in Pastor Payton? And has he changed from that person or do you did see him in the same way as that report depicts him?"

Dcn. Travis said that it was his Godly love that made him ignore the report because, "...it's just hearsay."

Deacon Bill Richards tried to make us understand why he felt the report had no bearings on Pastor Payton being voted in as pastor, "I don't look at a man from what someone else has said. The person I saw those weeks before we hired him was a man of God."

In Pastor Payton's hands was another piece of paper sent to the church by his wife. This letter informed us that Mrs. Payton was stepping down from her position as deaconess and would just sit in the congregation when it's time for the service's sermon.

In defense of his name, Pastor Payton asked if the deacons contacted his current pastor. The Deacon Board confirmed they had, but couldn't arrange a meeting. Unfortunately for the deacons, pastors talk, and Pastor Payton knew that his current pastor tried to set up an evening meeting with the Deacon Board months ago, but the deacons declined. Dcn. Travis returned to his seat as Pastor Payton explained the reason for Payton's falling out with Bishop Campbell was due to Campbell's money laundering. According to Pastor Payton, when Mr. and Mrs. Payton confronted Campbell, Bishop Campbell turned on them - not the other way around as written in the report.

Trustee Sinclair Millard jumped from his seat to make sure everyone knew that he and Dcn. Travis were the ones who contacted Pastor Payton and drilled him about what kind of man Payton was.

Pastor Payton smiled as Tr. Millard blamed the congregation for voting Payton in immediately after hearing the letter, "I told them to think about the letter for thirty days before making a vote, but they just couldn't wait."

Pastor Payton verbally noted that he knows a significant portion of the congregation doesn't appreciate his view of the Baptist church, "You need to remember that you are Christians first, that just happen to be in a Baptist church."

With a sneering face, Sister Juanita Greene remarked, "We already know that."

Brother Herbert Jacobs, like myself, wanted to know what the "issues" hindering the church's progression were and who could come up with some solutions. Before he could get an answer, Bro. Jacob made sure the church leaders knew how disappointed he was about this entire situation because his family came to him for guidance. Sadly for

Bro Jacobs, the people he looked up to the most - the church leaders - weren't providing him the teachings he needed to properly educate his family.

Bro. Jacobs closed out with this: "It's sad that a lot of people aren't getting anything out of the church anymore."

Deacon Dewey Holly expressed his disgruntlement with the congregation by saying, "Y'all need to figure out where you want the church to go. I can't solve that for you. Pastor Payton knows this and he needs to get it right. And I don't care who doesn't like what I just said. I don't care if you like me or you don't. I'm not going to lose my salvation for (this church). And if there's another meeting, [lowering his voice] I'm not coming."

Brother Matthew Walker couldn't stand it anymore, moving from his seat to speak up, "We've been sitting here for over four hours and we haven't done nothing! We could solve three problems right now by doing items B (Start time of church services), D (Presentations during church services) and F (Depletion of the Senior Choir)."

First item to address was B. In a little over five minutes, it was decided that Sunday School would conclude at 10:35; Praise Service would go from 10:45-11:00; and the actual service started at 11:00, with or without Pastor Payton. Second discussion was in regard to the Senior Choir.

Solution: Senior Choir controlled the 1st Sunday because, according to Brother Walker, "They are the best thing going. Singin' for the Lord like nobody's business."

Following a huge ovation for Bro. Walker after his comments, presentations was talked about. A three-minute debate ended with the decision that presentations would happen after service. Three issues were rectified in less than fifteen minutes.

Dcn. Holly felt there was another problem that could be solved quickly - an explanation about the Pastor Aid committee's usage of its money.

President of the Pastor Aid, Amos "Baritone" Macklin, defended the Pastor Aid's actions for the simple fact no one in the Deacon Board ever confronted him on the problems when they felt the money wasn't being handled properly.

Stomping his foot, Brother Macklin said, "I am a man, Deacon Holly! And if you needed to say something to me, you could have told me. Maybe the problem is there are no deacons on the Pastor Aid."

Dcn. Holly replied, almost stumbling over his words, “It’s just a lot of stuff’s been talked about; too much to talk about here. This has been going on before you. Around (Brother Albert Coleman’s) time.”

Bro. Macklin defended Bro. Coleman by telling Dcn. Holly that Bro. Coleman was doing what was told to him and followed the rules as such.

Trying to refocus everyone on the lack of support the Deacon Board receives in comparison to Pastor Cyrus Payton’s Armor Bearers, Deacon Bill Richards said, “We don’t have the chance to do what the armor bearer’s do now. Pastor Payton used to go places. But Pastor Payton don’t go nowhere no more with us.”

Sister Valentine Moore voiced her rebuttal to the feelings Dcn. Richards had, “The reason the deacons don’t like the armor bearers is just that - (the deacons) can’t do what they want because someone else went above and beyond to do it before them. What the armor bearers are doing is what makes (the Deacon Board) jealous.”

In support of the Deacon Board’s angst was Trustee Sinclair Millard. Throwing his hands in the air to cheer on Chairman of the Deacon Board Dewey Holly, Tr. Millard echoed Dcn. Holly insisting the Pastor Aid funds be only used to assist Pastor Payton - not for workshops that could push the deacons out of the way in favor of armor bearers. In an effort to make sure Dcn. Holly’s declaration about the Pastor Aid’s money be properly utilized, Sister Susan Toliver - Associate Minister Zachary Toliver’s wife - challenged any deacon to join the Pastor Aid. Dcn. Holly offered his services, causing a collective groan to move throughout the room.

Sister Ester Harris suddenly stood to speak, “I know a lot of people don’t like me because I’m real! They wanna get rid of me because I tell ‘em like it is! And I hate to see the deacons get beaten up like this. When those other ministers left, it was the deacons that picked up the pieces because those ministers left the church in shambles. If S. T. Dalloway (a deceased Deacon Board member) was here, this meeting wouldn’t even be happening. Y’all need to stop pretendin’! I’m an old coon and I can look at someone in their face and know if they mad or not!”

When Sis. Harris sat down, Dcn. Holly demanded that something be resolved between Pastor Payton and the Deacon Board. Pastor Payton decided on the 15th of

December that the Deacon Board and himself would have a sit-down. A loud round of applause rang out when the Deacon Board agreed to meet on the date.

As everything seemed to be settling down and heading toward a satisfying conclusion, a fired-up Sister Charlotte Travis - the woman Pastor Payton called out about stirring rumors in the church - jumped to her feet. Sis. Travis admitted that she has come to Pastor Payton and his wife for personal issues, but never about church business.

Sis. Travis was still hurt over Payton calling her a liar when she denied being a church gossip, saying seconds later, "And I think you need to apologize for calling me a liar when I told the truth."

"I said you have come to us trying to find the truth in rumors," Pastor Payton informed her. "So I'm not going to apologize."

Doing a complete 360-degree spin in front of her chair, Sis. Travis yelled, "What? Apologize for callin' me a liar! Apologize now, in front of God and the church members who know you are lyin' on me!"

Pastor Payton asked Sis. Travis to calm herself, but would not give her the apology she sought. In an effort to help Pastor Payton bring the anger levels down, Deacon Roscoe Calhoun started loudly reading Psalms. The soothing nature of the Word allowed everyone to refocus and pray together for the church's growth in love and patience to conclude this five and a half hour marathon.

Chapter 4: The October 2011 Business Meeting

Several months passed following the December 2010 call meeting without much conflict. The minor situations that flared between either the congregation members or the church leaders were quickly diffused and settled. By the summer, things were looking more positive and friendly than it had been in years. Then something unexpected happened. The Chairman of the Deacon Board Dewey “Doughy” Holly was involved in a car accident and charged with driving while intoxicated.

Giving Holly and his family some time to process the situation and recover, the church awaited patiently for Dcn. Holly to return and apologize for his behavior. Though Dcn. Holly returned to church nearly two months after the accident, the explanation and apology a majority of the congregation was anticipating never came. The congregation hoped to rectify the situation at the church’s October Business Meeting.

Following Sister Bertha Cooke’s reading of the minutes from the July Business Meeting, the Financial Committee gave its quarterly report. Trustee Sinclair Millard spoke about the church being in dire straits financially. With that knowledge, the Finance Committee planned to make some huge budget cuts starting next year. One of those cuts included getting rid of the Love Offering for visiting preachers. At the request of Pastor Cyrus Payton to emphasize the Love Offerings’ impact, Tr. Millard explained that since visiting preachers don’t need expense coverage as much as they used to, there’s no need for the extra \$250 offering.

Echoing Pastor Payton’s sentiments was Sister Valentine Moore asking, “How much does \$250 really hurt the church?”

Tr. Millard replied with a question of his own, “Did you see the money?” while pointing at the report everyone was given at the meeting’s start.

Sis. Moore couldn't understand how the Finance Committee felt the church could grow "spiritually" if everything got cut and the budget shrank with each Business Meeting.

Sis. Cooke blamed the lack of money on the members spending the church's money on food rather than using it to help grow the church's bank account.

"I say we is too eatin' people," said Sis. Cooke - who could be considered closer to obese than in shape.

Sis. Cooke continued her tirade about the church members only giving, "...five, ten, fifteen dollars, and expect the church to have money. Y'all need to examine y'allselves."

Sister Gloria Henderson stood up to question how Sis. Cooke and everyone else can blame the people about giving money when they don't know the situation those same people are in. Sis. Henderson questioned Sis. Cooke's faith when it comes to money when Sis. Cooke has gone out of her way to remind people that the Lord will take care of the church and its finances.

Sis. Cooke hastily defended herself and her faith by saying, "My faith is in God! I give my money knowin' God gon' give it back to me! I don't what you thinkin', but I know what God will do for me!"

Sister Gloria Henderson didn't believe the church's finances were in bad of shape as the committee was leading us to think; stating that the committee was sitting on the money instead of using it.

Chairman of the Deacon Board Dewey "Doughy" Holly slowly rose to say that he looks at the church money like he looks at his own bank account, "Just 'cause it's in the bank doesn't mean I'm going to go spend it all up."

After Dcn. Holly's statement, someone yelled from the back, "At least you got something!"

When Sis. Henderson initiated a verbal tennis game with Dcn. Holly about using the church's money, it took Pastor Cyrus Payton, Sister Bertha Cooke and Deacon Samuel Travis to calm Sis. Henderson.

As Sis. Henderson returned to her seat, Dcn. Holly informed us that it takes over \$50,000 a year to run the church.

Sister Ester Harris decided to make her presence known by saying the church has been, "...spluuuuurgin' too much," to make any headway when it comes to building church capital.

Most ignored Sis. Harris' statement; with people like Sister Josephine Elliot still processing and openly questioning Sis. Cooke's statement about how much people were giving in their church offerings since Sis. Cooke isn't a member of the Finance Committee anymore. Sis. Cooke explained that since she used to work on the committee, she knew the giving habits of the congregation.

Sis. Elliot quickly replied, "But that was a long time ago. Unless you have someone on the inside telling you everything, you can't say in your heart you know the finances are bad because the church members aren't giving enough."

As Dcn. Holly, Dcn. Travis, and Trustee Sinclair Millard tried to disprove Sis. Elliot's theory of a, "...lack of confidentiality in the Finance Committee," Sis. Cooke could be heard saying, "It's just a figure of speech I use. It don't mean nothin'."

Sis. Cooke's comment about the congregation using money to buy food rather than help the church and others from earlier also frustrated several members.

Sister Audrey Thornton informed everyone that during the last few times food had been served at the church, the money came out of the cooks' pockets and not from the church's bank account.

Seeing the spirit of dissension rising, Assistant Pastor Zachary Toliver decided to use the Word to help settle this possible situation. Bro. Toliver read a scripture from the book of John that read God is pleased with those who do right with the church's money; helping those who can't help themselves.

Scowling, Dcn. Travis became infuriated with Bro. Toliver's reading; shouting, "How dare you read that scripture knowing what's going on right now?"

A look of confusion and hurt shown on Bro. Toliver's face as he tried to explain himself. Sadly for Bro. Toliver, he wasn't allowed to defend his actions due to Sis. Cooke, Dcn. Holly's wife Sister Deborah Holly, and Sis. Harris yelled that "we" (the church members not a part of the Finance Committee) don't understand how the money is allocated and shouldn't try to make decisions.

After Sis. Henderson asked the Lord to show her understanding in regards to the church's finances, Bro. Toliver took the chance to speak about what he read, "The point I was trying to make was the Lord is happy to see people working hard to utilize His money properly. I meant no harm. I was hoping to encourage the Finance Committee, not insult it."

For the first time since the meeting began, Deacon Roscoe Calhoun talked to us by exclaiming, "Don't y'all see that the Devil is having a field day with us right now? How can we give anyone spiritual advice when we argue like this? We need to start esteeming one another instead of just ourselves!"

Looking around the room, Dcn. Calhoun wanted us to know this church wasn't alone in carrying a burden, "(A nearby church) is having problems too, because they lettin' the Devil ride them. We gotta stop lettin' the Devil ride us! Don't let the Devil ride you anymo'!"

After things settled down and we heard reports from the various committees, Trustee Ronald Brooks noted that the Planning Committee replaced the stolen license plates on the church van. People started laughing after the announcement for some strange reason. When my father asked Tr. Brooks about what measures had been put in place to prevent another theft, my father and Assistant Minister Zachary Toliver - who works for a lock company - suggested some ways to help Bro. Brooks and the church plan for a possible future robbery. Trustee Allen White spoke up, denouncing the suggestions because he himself could figure out various workarounds.

Instead, Tr. White said his "better" idea that a majority of the members liked, "What we should do is get some personalized plates."

Before a decision could be made, Sister Freda Watson talked about her frightening experience in the church that involved a policeman warning her about someone calling 911 from inside the church during one of her cleaning sessions. Though the officer thoroughly searched the church, they found no one.

Adding to the fear were Deacon Dewey Holly, Tr. White, and several other church members talking about people parking their cars and SUVs in the church's parking lot during the night. Some unwanted guest went as far as to camp behind the church until Tr. White forced them to get out.

Once everyone calmed their nerves, we moved onto new business that focused on Deacon Holly's decision to remain Chairman of the Deacon Board following his wreck, arrest and subsequent Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) charge. After some uncomfortable silence, Sister Gloria Henderson asked Dcn. Holly about his plans and if he needed help for his drinking problem. Before Dcn. Holly could respond, Sis. Henderson gave her opinion on the matter and requested Dcn. Holly do the right thing and step down.

Sis. Henderson was determined to make a case in favor of her mindset by reminding the congregation, Deacon Board, and Pastor Cyrus Payton that another deacon suffered from alcoholism in the past and was forced to step down. In Sis. Henderson's view, letting Dcn. Holly stay Chairman of the Deacon Board was nothing short of favoritism and a showing of blatant ignorance to the truth.

The pro-Dcn. Holly members started chatting louder and louder, drowning out Sis. Henderson's statements and questions.

Without warning, Dcn. Holly's wife Deborah Holly demanded that Sis. Henderson stop her "tirade", "You need to sit down!"

Suddenly, Sis. Henderson stopped talking. The room fell eerily quiet. Something was about to break loose.

With her eyes shut, Sister Gloria Henderson was visibly restraining herself as Sister Deborah Holly and Sister Ester Harris ordered Sis. Henderson to, "...shut up already!"

Sis. Henderson opened her eyes during this session of verbal abuse, stating in Sis. Holly's direction, "I asked the Lord to help me because if I was a lesser Christian I would've shut you up without praying for you. Um, hum."

Pastor Cyrus Payton asked for everyone to settle themselves and give Deacon Dewey Holly his chance to speak.

Using his right crutch to lean on, Dcn. Holly addressed the DWI as, "...a silly mistake that's been blown way out of proportion."

For some reason, Dcn. Holly brought up supposed rumors that he had been cheating on his wife. Dcn. Holly expressed his disappointment about the current situation and his humbleness ("I am that humble.").

Dcn. Holly admitted he had planned to speak to the church about the incident, but only when he felt like it, "...and after I took the time to speak with my fellow deacons and God. And I took the advice of my fellow deacons. I talked to God and he hasn't told me to do anything differently. I know what God wants me to do, and I don't care what y'all do. But just so y'all know, I don't care about this position. Nowhere in the Bible does it say anything about a 'Chairman of the Deacon Board'."

Slightly turning to face Pastor Payton, Dcn. Holly stated that Pastor Payton kept the Deacon Board in the dark when it came to this meeting's agenda. This angered Deacon Roscoe Calhoun and Sis. Ester Harris so much that Pastor Payton had to take them into the church sanctuary to calm them.

With all eyes on Dcn. Holly following the escorting of Dcn. Calhoun and Sis. Harris out of room, the Chairman of the Deacon Board directed his next statement at Sis. Henderson, "(Sis. Henderson) wants me to step down, but I'm not!"

When Sis. Henderson reiterated the dismissal of the other deacon due to his drinking, Dcn. Holly asked, "I don't know how many things (Deacon) Cedric Hart did before he got kicked out, but it happens to me once and I'm condemned?"

After Dcn. Holly's comment drew agreeing nods from the deacons, Sis. Henderson questioned the Deacon Board, "If all the deacons agree with Deacon Holly, then I wonder if they need to step down because I don't know if they're doing right."

Sis. Henderson's words drew the ire of Sis. Deborah Holly, forcing Sis. Holly to reveal that Sis. Henderson called the Holly home to leave a nasty message on their answering machine.

Hearing Sis. Holly order, "Tell it all!" caused Sis. Henderson to admit that she did call the Holly family.

Sis. Henderson reminded Sis. Holly that Deborah called first, warning Sis. Henderson to not spread rumors about Dcn. Holly's crash and subsequent arrest. Sis. Henderson called Sis. Holly, explaining that she just wanted to get the entire story from someone since Dcn. Holly refused to contact anyone and explain his side of the story.

The Dcn. Holly-supporters verbally jumped Sis. Henderson about calling church members to tell them what happened to Dcn. Holly when she didn't have all of the information.

When Sis. Henderson tried to defend herself, Sis. Holly demanded that Pastor Payton settle this situation; stating, “As a pastor, you need to stop this! Be a man! Be a man and stop this!”

With cooler heads prevailing again, my father took it upon himself to give his opinion on what Deacon Dewey Holly should do about stepping down as Chairman of the Deacon Board following his DWI charge. My father expressed his concern over Dcn. Holly’s mental, physical and spiritual health before suggesting Dcn. Holly should step down.

Before Dcn. Holly could respond, Sister Deborah Holly returned to a standing position so she could condemn us for not calling and checking on Dcn. Holly status after the accident, “If you supposed to be children of God, you would call and tell him, ‘I’m thinking about you and praying for you.’ People on the street will call and check on him, but not the church members. The thing I’m most upset about is the pastor and associate minister not calling Dewey. How you gonna preach to the people if you’re not doing what you’re supposed to be doing? There’s no compassion.... Y’all have to be real. This is not for real.”

When Sis. Holly returned to her seat, I took the opportunity to speak. I asked if Dcn. Holly had the decency to tell the church about his accident and ask for forgiveness. As I questioned Dcn. Holly about apologizing to the church, Trustee Allen White shook his head disappointingly.

I switched subjects to something that had been bothering me for a long time when I saw I wasn’t getting any answers from the Deacon Board. I noted the lack of respect for the Communion ceremony and how people are reading the Communion convenient as a promise to God, but not abiding by it because gossiping kept spread and grudges were still being held.

“It seems like we’re just poisoning ourselves,” I said, “and that’s why everything is like it is today.”

Several seconds passed without a response from anyone in the room outside of a few members nodding their heads to agree with me.

Dcn. Holly told the congregation that people taking the Communion improperly with stained hearts had no bearing on himself or the Deacon Board. In the same vein, he

saw the DWI as a mistake that only he could account for and doesn't have to be discussed by church members.

After Dcn. Holly and I took our seats to reopen the floor, Sister Coreen Richards - Deacon Bill Richards' wife - explained her belief that the judgmental attitudes in the church body were skewed in favor of Pastor Cyrus Payton. Proof of this came when Sis. Richards and Pastor Payton had an incident that she refused to fully detail, but affirmed that Pastor Payton took something personal and made it public.

Like Sis. Holly, Sis. Richards questioned how we could judge someone like Dcn. Holly when our own pastor, "...is living wrong."

Sister Josephine Elliot reminded like-minded people similar to Sis. Richards and Sis. Holly that this section of the meeting wasn't about Pastor Payton not living in accordance to the Word, but what the Deacon Board planned to do with Dcn. Holly after he disgraced the name of the church by refusing to step down as a leader following his fall from grace.

Sis. Elliot remarked, "And another thing that really scares me is the whole Deacon Board sees nothing wrong with (Dcn. Holly's DWI and not stepping down). You (Dcn. Holly) have to be held accountable for it."

Before anyone could reply, Sis. Elliot revealed that certain deacons were sitting in the barbershop, "...talking about the pastor. Y'all keep talking about money. Y'all keep acting like you're acting, there won't be anymore church. Why? Because you have your little posse that'll keep you in this church. And don't lie. We all know what's going on. I'm sorry, but I *can not* look up to someone like you all in the Deacon Board."

Furious over the questioning of Dcn. Holly about stepping down following his arrest and DWI, Sister Ester Harris demanded everyone, "...to stop treatin' (Dcn. Holly) like a dog!"

Deacon Samuel Travis echoed Dcn. Holly's earlier sentiments about Pastor Cyrus Payton not warning the Deacon Board about the verbal "abuse" they were receiving today. Dcn. Travis claimed the congregation didn't care about Dcn. Holly's life and how we weren't Christians because asking Dcn. Holly to step down wasn't showing forgiveness.

Deacon Bill Richards took his stand to say the congregation was trying to ridicule and persecute Deacon Dewey Holly without thinking about how much these questions were hurting Dcn. Holly's morale. Switching gears, Dcn. Richards admitted that he was one of the deacons talking in barbershops about Pastor Payton as Sister Josephine Elliot verbally noted earlier. According to Dcn. Richards, the barbershop attendees asked what was going on in the church and he answered as best he could.

Dcn. Richards admitted, "If y'all knew half the stuff I did, you'd want me to step down. Shoot, you'd probably have to do the same for the whole Deacon Board."

Dcn. Richards' focus changed to the members' defense of exiled ex-deacon Cedric Hart during his dismissal by explaining, "You know what? I don't wanna badmouth Cedric Hart, but that man came to church drunk ... several times."

When Dcn. Richards sat down, Sister Selena Davidson proclaimed, "We say we growing. We not growing," before leaving the room.

My father explained his stance on Dcn. Holly stepping down by saying that this part of the meeting wasn't about punishing Dcn. Holly or having a lack of forgiveness. Instead, this was a reminder that Dcn. Holly staying on as Chairman of the Deacon Board showed how much lack of respect Dcn. Holly and the Deacon Board had for their positions and, more importantly, the outside perception that had already been ruined thanks to Dcn. Holly not stepping down soon after the arrest.

Members started asking Pastor Payton about his feelings on the entire situation involving Dcn. Holly. Pastor Payton said that he talked with Dcn. Holly shortly after the accident.

During the conversation between Pastor Payton and Dcn. Holly, Pastor Payton offered Dcn. Holly a three-step process for rectification: 1. Step down; 2. Restoration through mediation with the Lord; 3. Reconciliation with the members of the church.

Pastor Payton said that Dcn. Holly opted to not take Pastor Payton on his offer. In Pastor Payton's opinion, it was up to the members to rectify this problem in the Deacon Board. Dcn. Holly's wife Sister Deborah Holly said the decision of whether or not Dcn. Holly should stay a Deacon Board member was up to the deacons themselves following a sit-down long discussion. Most of the members at this Business Meeting liked Sis. Holly's idea.

I suggested that before or after an upcoming church service, all the church members - who have been given at least a two week notice of what's going to happen - vote on if Dcn. Holly should stay or go as a deacon. Then, after at least a six-month period, Dcn. Holly could reapply to join the board and the church members would be allowed vote to on Dcn. Holly's reinstatement in Deacon Board. Many members booed and loudly proclaimed that they hated my idea.

My father expressed his belief that Dcn. Holly should step down so he can recollect himself. If Dcn. Holly refused to step down, the church members would make the decision to keep Dcn. Holly on the Deacon Board.

Sister Bertha Cooke asked if Pastor Payton's three-step program was an option. Sis. Elliot reminded Sis. Cooke that if Dcn. Holly didn't want to utilize Pastor Payton's offer then, he wouldn't now.

Following several minutes of back and forth arguing over the options, Dcn. Holly and his wife left after Dcn. Holly told everyone listening that it didn't matter what the vote was because he knew he was doing right by his life and family.

Dcn. Travis jumped from his seat, telling everyone the only way to settle this was to vote right now - should Dcn. Holly stay or go?

Brother Albert Coleman seconded the motion for a vote right now. By a show of hands, the members currently in the room voted on whether or not Dcn. Holly should stay as a Deacon Board member.

With Assistant Minister Zachary Toliver and Sis. Bertha Cooke counting, the final tally was twenty-two to eight in favor of Dcn. Holly staying as Chairman of the Deacon Board. When the announcement was made, the Dcn. Board, Sis. Cooke and several others made a dash for the door. The members that honored the agenda stayed back to conclude the meeting with a prayer.

Chapter 5: The October 2011 Call Meeting

Not twenty-four hours had passed since the October Business Meeting's conclusion when another call meeting was announced for the end of October (three weeks following the Business Meeting). This call meeting would allow the Deacon Board to address the church's leadership problems.

To make matters worse, rumors were swirling about the Deacon Board pulling a coup d'état by voting Pastor Cyrus Payton out; and the county's sheriff would be called to force the exiled Payton out. The church's members' decisive feelings - being pro or anti-Pastor Payton - was growing more and more evident; taking away the peace that had grown since the last call meeting ten months earlier.

Following Deacon Dewey Holly's reading of why the Deacon Board called this meeting (the supposed abusing of Dcn. Holly during the Business Meeting when trying to get an explanation of why he didn't step down as Chairman of the Deacon Board after his Driving While Intoxicated charge) Deacon Samuel Travis emphasized Dcn. Holly's point that this meeting was for the congregation in attendance to understand how the Deacon Board felt Pastor Cyrus Payton wasn't working up to par as per the contract he signed upon becoming pastor of the church. Dcn. Travis suddenly asked if anyone had any comments or thoughts on the situation. The room got eerily quiet as if they were waiting for one particular person to stand up and say something. I noticed after a few seconds that all eyes were on me.

I took my stand with the warning that what I had to say could take a while. I verbally reflected on the call meeting from last February that ended with Pastor Payton declaring the lack of communication between himself and the Deacon Board was hindering the church, and the deacons agreeing. As everyone mumbled that I was right, I

pulled out a rolled up piece of paper - the letter I wrote and delivered to the church on the first Sunday in September of 2010.

Comparing the letter to the old adage of a tree falling in the woods without anyone to hear it make a sound, I dropped the paper on the floor as a few people audibly noted, "It didn't do anything."

I talked about the call meeting I had in regards to "The Letter" during the fifth Sunday in October of 2010 where I was allowed to address the church in regards to "The Letter", how a lot of people supported what "The Letter" said, and believed "The Letter" would mean great things for the church. Even though everything seemed like rainbows and lollipops after my call meeting, another call meeting was needed - happening in December of the same year.

I explained that during the second call meeting of 2010, "...the whole gamut of emotions were displayed at the December 2010 Call Meeting."

I talked about how a lot of people blamed Mrs. Abigail Payton (the church's First Lady and Pastor Payton's wife) for the church's downfall, including Sister Brenda Cooke. Sis. Cooke tried to correct me by stating she didn't say those things about Mrs. Payton being a problem in the church, but I reminded her that she did tell us what old church members were saying to her about Mrs. Payton - statements Sis. Cooke repeated and agreed with in the December 2010 Call Meeting.

With Sis. Cooke's eyes rolling following my rebuttal of her claims, I recapped the December 2010 Call Meeting's conclusion that saw Pastor Payton and the Deacon Board agree to work on their problems through Wednesday night meetings.

Deacon Roscoe Calhoun interrupted me to inform us that the meetings, "...lasted for about two weeks."

Refocusing on "The Letter", I looked at the dropped paper before stating that "The Letter" didn't mean a thing to confused congregation because those church members didn't know what they really wanted.

I decided to address the rumors going around that the Deacon Board wanted to oust Pastor Cyrus Payton today, and how police would be called to prevent Pastor Payton from stepping on the church's ground - a rumor I vocally proclaimed was a scare tactic.

I had a few simple questions. What is the truth? Who is Pastor Payton really that a lot of Pastor Payton supporters aren't seeing? These queries were aimed at everyone who thought Pastor Payton needed to go.

Before the previous questions could be answered, I quickly asked the Deacon Board who was next in line if Pastor Payton was voted out. According to the bylaws - as I noted - the Associate Minister (Brother Zachary Toliver in this case) would take the place of a pastor if that pastor was voted out or leaves. I iterated that Associate Minister Toliver would probably leave if Pastor Payton went, "...just like a lot of people have stated over the last few weeks about themselves."

"So," I said to the Deacon Board's direction, "if there is someone else next in line, have they been working alongside certain people to get rid of Pastor Payton?"

Deacon Dewey Holly rose from his seat to me cut off by saying I was going a little too far in what was supposed to be accomplished today. Dcn. Holly reminded everyone that a vote for something as important as whether the pastor stayed or went couldn't occur at a call meeting.

Turning to his fellow deacons, Dcn. Holly asked them, "What direction are we going?"

Dcn. Holly told everyone in attendance that we don't need to know some of the stuff that has gone on between the deacons and the pastor before calling the congregation shortsighted and uninformed, "I love Pastor Payton, but I'm looking at everything overall. The fact is we don't need to get rid of Pastor Payton, but his leadership skills aren't made for (the church). He goes on to make changes to schedules without the Deacon Board's consent and starts rumors of non-existent cliques."

After Dcn. Holly asked what would happen if the pastor left, and if the church leadership roles would fall on the congregation's shoulders, I reiterated that the bylaws state either the Associative Minister or the Deacon Board would lead. Deacons Holly and Roscoe Calhoun tried to correct me by saying weren't in the bylaws.

With a copy of the bylaws in my possession, I revealed that I was telling the truth. As members, "Awed!" around me, I attempted to read a highlighted portion justifying my stance when Dcn. Holly interrupted me again to admit the Deacon Board would step up as heads of the church if and when Pastor Payton was dismissed.

Dcn. Holly suggested everyone think before they speak for the simple fact a lot of people who speak don't know what's going on. Still standing, I reminded Dcn. Holly that the truth is all I wanted.

When I was able to read the bylaws that stated the assistant/associate minister would replace the leaving pastor, Dcn. Calhoun declared, "We don't have an 'assistant' minister, so none of that matters! And with all respect, Brother Jake, I just wanna say that you is askin' for the truth. I guarantee if you sit down, you'll hear some of it."

"Well," I replied, "I would be sitting down right now if I wasn't interrupted by Deacon Holly. Speaking of Deacon Holly - if we're going by the bylaws, that vote we did at the last Business Meeting is null and void since that vote wasn't announced in advanced; as per the bylaws."

Sister Ester Harris - who was sitting in front of me - commented, "That's what we're here about today."

I concluded by asking everyone to look deep within themselves and truly answer the questions before them.

My father took a stand to present the Deacon Board with a complaint. Standing with piece of paper, my father read his letter that called for the Deacon Board to be reprimanded for allowing Deacon Dewey Holly to stay as Chairman of the Deacon Board after attaining a Driving While Intoxicated charge in July. Dcn. Holly rose from his seat again, telling my father that he could not continue reading his letter; and it needed to be brought up during a separate call meeting. Dcn. Holly informed everyone that the Deacon Board had nothing to do with the agenda subject of "Church members thoughts on church status."

With the support of several people who vocalized to the Deacon Board how vague "Church members thoughts on church status," my father was able to finish reading his letter after Dcn. Holly willingly sat down.

My father's letter gained hardly any reaction until he read the part where it stated that the Deacon Board allowing Dcn. Holly to stay disrespected the, "...good name of (the church)," and, "...did not fulfill the deacons' obligation to the church above relationships and friends."

My father handed his letter around for anyone who wanted to sign in agreement with this statement.

Sister Lisa Calhoun was the next to speak; asking for anyone who had a problem with Pastor Cyrus Payton to show themselves rather than having a divide of pro and anti-Pastor Payton members going back and for. The first to step up in the “Anti-Pastor Payton” camp was none other than Sister Bertha Cooke.

Sis. Cooke emphasized her vision being on the “spiritual level” before telling us in a very frustrated tone, “Y’all can all just be quiet,” when people started mumbling.

Sis. Cooke restarted her speech with the focus moving from her spirituality to the youth of the church, and Pastor Payton's supposed lack of concern over the church's youngest members. Sis. Cooke had an example for her reasoning. A few months ago, Sis. Cooke's granddaughter decided she wanted to join a church. Four churches were in the running, including Sis. Cooke's church. When Sis. Cooke asked her granddaughter about her decision, the granddaughter said she wasn't joining her grandmother's church, but another that Sis. Cooke couldn't remember the name of.

“Why?” Sis. Cooke asked her granddaughter. “Why did you choose that church?”

Sis. Cooke's granddaughter answered, “The preacher. He talks to us. He even said there is something special in us.”

That was all Sis. Cooke needed to hear to know that Pastor Payton wasn't doing his job with the youth. But Sis. Cooke had another story about the confrontation between herself and the family Payton about her letter she'd written. Sis. Cooke claimed that her letter came from God to tell Pastor Payton how they should be there for the youth. According to Sis. Cooke, while the Paytons said they didn't think helping the youth was their responsibility, Pastor Payton promised to be at a few Youth Bible Study sessions. Sis Cooke heard secondhand that Pastor Payton didn't attend any Youth Bible Study meeting; thus showing Pastor Payton as someone who doesn't live up to his word.

Sis. Cooke was also upset that Pastor Payton didn't come to any of the church picnics, even though as recently as last June, Pastor Payton stood at the pulpit and remarked how much fun he had playing volleyball with the members at the church's summer picnic.

But missing the 2011 summer picnic angered Sis. Cooke - who claimed Pastor Payton used the excuse of visiting his legally-blind mother-in-law and breast cancer afflicted mother as ways to avoid attending. Sis. Cooke called out Pastor Payton for not repenting when he visibly hurt Sister Sandra Jacobs and Sister. Coreen Richards. Sis. Cooke never explained how Pastor Payton hurt them.

Blaming those defending Pastor Payton for the church's problems, Sis. Cooke exclaimed, "...y'all need a self-examination!"

Sis. Cooke said that Pastor Payton told her in private that he'd leave the church before the congregation split, but didn't when that time came. To add insult to injury, at Business Meeting following their talk, Pastor Payton told everyone listening about the talk he had with Sis. Cooke.

Sis. Cooke immediately switched subjects, stating that a petition passed around to rid the church of Sister Charlotte Travis for calling Pastor Payton a liar and how God would strike him down during the previous Call Meeting almost a year ago was a disgrace. Sis. Cooke promised to pray that Pastor Payton would become the man of God he claims to be. Sis. Cooke also declared she'd pray for us to seek God before reminding us that she loved Pastor Payton; but things would be better off without him.

Deacon Bill Richards asked if we would listen to him. Dcn. Richards claimed that Pastor Cyrus Payton had talked out of both sides of his mouth to not only the Deacon Board, but also to the congregation. Dcn. Richards reiterated the scheduling changes Pastor Payton made that angered Deacon Dewey Holly, and how Pastor Payton promised to converse with the Deacon Board on all the changes, but didn't live up to his word.

Dcn. Richards switched subjects to the petition passed around by church members to remove Sister Charlotte Travis as a member many months ago, and how Pastor Payton pushed for the petition, "...because that's what the people want."

According to Dcn. Richards, the Deacon Board and several other members listened to the tape from the December 2010 Call Meeting - revealing that we were being secretly taped. The tape replayed how Pastor Payton verbally confronted Sis. Travis by calling her a liar, but not how Sis. Travis told Pastor Payton how he was going to Hell for, according to Sis. Travis, "...playing with God!"

To remind everyone what Sis. Travis did to add to the argument between Pastor Payton and Sister Hope Boykins.

Sis. Boykins reasonably called Sis Travis' words as, "...disrespectful."

Instead of agreeing with Sis. Boykins' viewpoint about the way Sis. Travis spoke to Pastor Payton, Dcn. Richards explained the Sis. Boykins didn't see the truth in Pastor Payton's actions.

Getting agitated, Sis. Boykins walked out of the room as Deacon Dewey Holly stood up to tell us how, "...those are the type of situations we don't wanna get into."

Sis. Boykins immediately reentered the room, asking Dcn. Holly to address her when she's in the room, not when she leaves. A big commotion ensued that saw Sis. Boykins be escorted out of the room by her mother, brother, Sister Valentine Moore, Sister Gloria Henderson, Brother Amos Macklin, and myself. During their calming of Sis. Boykins emotions, the remaining individuals in the dining room had a prayer moment led by Dcn. Holly. This prayer lasted a good five minutes.

When order was restored and the prayer concluded, Sister Rebecca Stevenson asked how today's resolution would help unify the church prior to wondering how the deacons would work with the next pastor if there is a voting out of Pastor Payton in the near future. To emphasize how much Pastor Payton meant well, Sis. Stevenson noted how many people have come to God since his arrival at the church.

Sister Ester Harris retorted, "God saved those souls, not him."

Sister Deborah Holly stated her noticing of the congregation's separation when Pastor Payton started using, "...false teachings," during the Sunday School service.

Brother Herbert Jacobs, being a man of silence rather than run his mouth and get tongue tied, admitted he had kept his mouth shut during most of these meetings. But today, Bro. Jacobs expressed his concern in regards to the church body. Seemingly being a fellow man of silence, Bro. Jacobs wanted to know why Pastor Payton wouldn't speak up to defend himself. Bro. Jacobs capped off his statement by asking what Pastor Payton's plan for the church was following this meeting.

Instead of hearing from Pastor Payton, Trustee Sinclair Millard stood up to speak on Pastor Payton's lack of love for everyone. To make his point clear, Tr. Millard told us the same story from the last Call Meeting about Pastor Payton not coming to visit his sick

sister in the hospital. Tr. Millard concluded his story by saying that the Trustee Board was trying to bring the church together.

Sister Valentine Moore made a great point that the people condemning Pastor Cyrus Payton for not being the perfect pastor they thought he would be, "...then shame on you. Everyone's human, and the pastor is no different. He's not perfect. No one is."

Sis. Moore talked about Sister Bertha Cooke's comment regarding Pastor Payton's lack of involvement in the church's Youth Bible Study. Sis. Moore noted that the reason Youth Bible Study didn't last long wasn't because of Pastor Payton not coming, but because the youth attendance dropped off little by little. Sis. Moore concluded by telling all the deacons to come out for the prayer services on Wednesday nights to promote the unity they supposedly want with Pastor Payton instead of just one or two deacons showing up every week.

Deacon Samuel Travis stated that he hadn't seen the congregation so confused like this before, "There is the worst I've ever seen (the church). There's no love here. There's only division. If you don't come together, it'll never get better."

I asked what Dcn. Travis felt would help unite the church, and if it involved getting rid of Pastor Payton.

Dcn. Travis didn't directly answer the question in regards to Pastor Payton, but did say, "...something needs to be done."

Sister Harriet Millard took her stand to talk about how disappointed she was about everything, and how she didn't really know who was Pastor Payton.

Situations like a group of people hogging Pastor Payton's time following the Sunday service made her stop caring about talking with Pastor Payton; saying, "And I have things to do, and I can't stand around all day and wait to talk to someone."

Sis. Millard didn't take kindly to people talking about "unity" when, "...a whole bunch of you don't even talk to your own brothers and sisters."

Sis. Millard also had an opinion about the petitions, "We need to stop the petitions because it just shows the people who do them don't have the nerve to call a real meeting."

For some reason, Millard's speech turned into a story about how everyone isn't sinless, and how having babies out of wedlock is wrong; though her daughter had a child while not married.

When Sis. Millard sat down, Hope Boykins took a chance to apologize for her earlier outburst, and how we need to control ourselves during this session.

To bring the focus back to Pastor Payton, Ronald Brooks asked the Deacon Board if Pastor Payton was fulfilling his contractual duties.

Deacon Bill Richards answered for the board by saying Pastor Payton has stripped the Deacon Board and the Trustee Board of its power before showing that he did have a copy of the contract Pastor Payton signed to get the job. After much request from everyone wondering what the contract actually said, Dcn. Travis read the page and a half pastoral contract in its entirety.

My father asked the Deacon Board after Dcn. Travis finished reading, "So, what has Pastor Payton not done in that contract to warrant a dismissal?"

Dcn. Travis answered my father's question with a confusing statement, "(Pastor Payton) takes it upon himself to change things."

My father then asked why the deacons supported Pastor Payton one minute, then turned on him the next. My father gave a good example of why he felt his question was valid by reminding Deacon Roscoe Calhoun how Dcn. Calhoun - during the "Pastor Appreciation" service only six days before this Call Meeting - talked about how Pastor Payton drove from Richmond, Virginia to Troy, VA in the snow for Bible Study.

Dcn. Calhoun verbally defended himself and his statement from last Sunday by saying, "...that happened eight, ten years ago, and doesn't change who he is."

Deacon Dewey Holly motioned for Deacon Roscoe Calhoun to sit down so the Chairman of the Deacon Board could say, "I'm tired of being tired. It's just been too hard to do anything under these constraints."

When Sister Hope Boykins tried to get a real answer out of the Deacon Board about what they wanted to do with Pastor Cyrus Payton, Sister Bertha Cooke took it upon herself to interrupt Sis. Boykins.

Sis. Boykins' brother Emit Boykins reminded Sis. Cooke, "No one interrupted you when you were runnin' yo' mouth!"

Sis. Cooke huffed following Bro. Boykins' statement, returning to her seat.

Everyone's attention returned to Dcn. Holly as he told the congregation that he was done with these call meetings and washed his hands of the whole situation.

Pastor Payton finally had his chance to speak, admitting that only two of the five deacons sitting before us spoke to Pastor Payton on a consistent basis.

According to Pastor Payton, "You're (the congregation) being misled by the deacons."

After stating that he didn't get any financial information on the church when personally requested by him, Pastor Payton proclaimed that the Trustee Board and the Deacon Board were working together to get rid of him. Trustee Sinclair Millard was stunned by this statement, throwing his hands up to defend himself, and how Pastor Payton was wrong about the accusation. Before Tr. Millard could fully explain himself, Pastor Payton suggested that the Deacon Board was working alongside someone outside of the church that had a vested interest in getting rid of Pastor Payton.

Pastor Payton wanted to talk about his visiting the Youth Bible Study (YBS) a few times. Dcn. Calhoun jumped out of his seat to argue the fact that Pastor Payton did anything with the YBS, stating that Pastor Payton only came a couple of times and sat in the corner to watch rather than participate with the deacons. Pastor Payton agreed that he didn't contribute like the Deacon Board wanted, but only because he refused to take the kids' focus away from the deacons when asking questions. Pastor Payton believed the children would've looked to him for answers rather than the deacons faithfully involved.

Dcn. Calhoun suddenly made an analogy comparing the church to a broken chair. In Dcn. Calhoun's story, one of the chair's four legs was broken. So what do you do with the chair? By stating the two options - fix it or throw it away - Dcn. Calhoun made his point and sat down.

After Pastor Payton condemned the deacons for becoming complacent and not working with Pastor Payton to help build the church, Sis. Boykins asked Pastor Payton if the deacons were doing *their* "contractual" job.

Pastor Payton didn't hesitate before answering Sis. Boykins question with a solemn, "No."

Pastor Payton's reasoning for them not being the deacons they should be could be traced back to just this past summer when only one or two of the deacons would show up for the Prayer & Praise services.

Pastor Payton answered Brother Herbert Jacobs' earlier question in regards to why Pastor Payton didn't speak during these calls meetings to defend himself, "I talk when the Spirit tells me. And the Spirit tells me right now a big problem with the church is the budgeting."

Trustee Sinclair Millard asked Pastor Cyrus Payton how he knew about these Trustee-Deacon Board meetings especially since Tr. Millard hadn't been involved in any of them. Several other Trustee Board members echoed Tr. Millard's sentiments. Pastor Payton reworded his prior statement by saying a Trustee Board member and a Deacon Board member had been conversing with a Reverend Dickson. Deacons Dewey Holly, Bill Richards, Carlton Stevens, and Tr. Millard vocalized their lack of understanding who Pastor Payton was talking about.

Suddenly, Deacon Roscoe Calhoun spoke up, "Oh, Reverend Dickson? Yeah, I know him. I know him real good. He's the former preacher at (another Baptist church)."

Pastor Payton smiled before telling everyone, "I think you see what I mean."

Completing his statement, Pastor Payton left the room so an unbiased decision could be made without his physical or verbal input.

Feeling a resolution was needed sooner than later, Dcn. Richards suggested the church vote on keeping or getting rid of Pastor Payton because, according to the Deacon Board, he hasn't lived up to his word. Dcn. Holly seconded this suggestion.

I raised his hand, angering Dcn. Holly enough for him to say that my input would take the meeting a step back. I informed Dcn. Holly that, yes, my next words would add to the possibility of a resolution rather than cause problems. Turning my attention to Dcn. Calhoun, I tried to make sure I understood what Dcn. Holly was referring to with his previous analogy about the broken chair representing what we needed to do with Pastor Payton. Dcn. Calhoun confirmed that I was right while also adding that his analogy represented right and wrong.

I followed up with a question, "So, what is right and wrong for this situation involving getting rid of Pastor Payton."

Instead of answering my question directly, Dcn. Calhoun threw out another analogy - this time about a wagon with no horse. Dcn. Calhoun never specified if the horse represented Pastor Payton or God. A lot of the people listening started laughing as Dcn. Calhoun made this roundabout statement that made no sense to the situation, or even expressed what he felt should be done with Pastor Payton.

Associate Minister Zachary Toliver wanted to know what the rest of the deacons felt. Dcn. Holly stopped his fellow deacons from answering by saying they expressed their feelings in the letter read at the top of the meeting.

Sister Hope Boykins questioned how Dcn. Holly could differ what's right from wrong after not stepping down following his Driving While Intoxicated charge that occurred in July, "How can you say what's right and wrong when your view is skewed?"

To show how other people have done worse than Dcn. Holly, Dcn. Richards singled out former Trustee Allen White, "Allen's did a whole bunch of stuff and no one condemned him."

Brother Allen White hastily stood up, admitting his wrongdoing and how he rectified things, "...but I did the right thing and stepped down."

Settling down this situation before it got any more out of control failed when Dcn. Holly's want for a vote in favor of keeping or getting rid of Pastor Payton turned into a huge shouting match that sounded like thousands of cicadas crying while being burned alive. The building was literally rumbling until Brother Amos Macklin screamed and stomped for everyone to be quiet.

After Bro. Macklin prayed some peace into this situation, the vote was cast. When Bro. Toliver started counting the hands in favor of keeping Pastor Payton (thirty-eight out of some fifty people), the Deacon Board got upset; stating that they didn't know what was going on, what they were voting for, and how this was going to help. Before the other option (getting rid of Pastor Payton) could be brought up for a vote, Dcn. Holly called for an adjournment. Church members Sister Bertha Cooke and Sister Deborah Holly, the Deacon Board, and the Trustee Board quickly left the church grounds prior to Pastor Payton reentering the room to calm things down. A closing prayer was headed by Pastor Payton, but things were just as unsettled as before.

Chapter 6: The Happenings

During the October 29th, 2011 Call Meeting, another call meeting was announced for the first Sunday in December five weeks later. The division that scarred the church was growing more and more as members visibly picked sides, including myself. Services between the last two call meetings of the year were tense and somewhat hostile. Thanks to these feelings, incidents occurred between the two call meetings that set the tone for the year's end. These are the happenings between the 10/29/11 and 12/3/11 call meetings.

November 6, 2011

On the first Sunday in November, Deacon Roscoe Calhoun led the collection of tithes and offerings. As usual for Dcn. Calhoun, he gave a testimony/mini-sermon before the ceremony could commence.

In his closing statement, Dcn. Calhoun wanted us to know we couldn't be servants to three different people/beings in this life, "You can't serve God, yourself, and Satan. It's either God or Satan. And I'll tell you right now, I'm servin' Satan!"

A shocked hush fell over the church as everyone waited for Dcn. Calhoun to correct himself. For almost a minute, Dcn. Calhoun stood before the church in what was nothing short of a daze; not saying a word or motioning for the ushers to come and start the tithes and offering. Several members asked Dcn. Calhoun about his, seemingly, misspoken phrase. For some odd reason, Dcn. Calhoun had no clue what the questioning people were talking about.

After the service, many members (including myself) asked Pastor Cyrus Payton about Dcn. Calhoun's comments. Pastor Payton called the statement a, "God-ordained showing of what and who Deacon Calhoun is about."

Also following the service, Pastor Payton met with my father, Brother Amos "Baritone" Macklin, Sister Selena Davidson, Sister Gloria Henderson, Sister Hope

Boykins, Sister Josephine Elliot, Sister Gretchen Wallace, and myself to talk about completing the incomplete motion of voting in favor of keeping or ousting Pastor Payton from the October 29th Call Meeting. Also, to follow Deacon Dewey Holly's decree that my father's letter to reprimand the Deacon Board for keeping Dcn. Holly as Chairman of the Deacon Board following his arrest and Driving While Intoxicated charge would be fully addressed in this call meeting.

With Pastor Payton's approval, the latest call meeting would be held on the fourth Sunday of November.

November 13, 2011

During his stay in the hospital, Deacon Dewey Holly resigned as Chairman of the Deacon Board via a letter sent to the church and read by Deacon Samuel Travis. When asked about reading the announcement for the upcoming call meeting to be held on the 4th Sunday, Dcn. Travis refused to comply. Pastor Cyrus Payton took it upon himself to inform everyone of the upcoming meeting.

November 20, 2011

During Pastor Cyrus Payton's absence Thanksgiving weekend, Associate Minister Zachary Toliver took the reins and performed the pastoral duties. To be in line with the church's bylaws, Bro. Amos Macklin announced that there would be a call meeting next week. With Bro. Macklin's decree, the required two week consecutive announcements in regards to upcoming call meetings was completed.

Dcn. Travis proclaimed there would be no November call meeting before reminding everyone of the "real" call meeting in December. The "real" call meeting would determine whether Pastor Payton stayed or went - thus going against the bylaws and Dcn. Holly's decree during the previous call meeting about a voting out of a pastor couldn't occur in a call meeting.

When several members questioned how the Deacon Board could override Pastor Payton's approval of the November call meeting, and Bro. Macklin's announcement in accordance with the bylaws, Dcn. Travis mockingly asked, "Who is 'Baritone'?"

A huge ruckus occurred afterwards. During the commotion, Dcn. Travis demanded the members restraining Bro. Macklin's mother from either physically or verbally defending her son let her go so she could arrested.

As the situation somewhat settled, upset members called for the Deacon Board's upheaval for instigating conflict in the church.

Thanksgiving Week

Several members of the church who were heading the upcoming 4th Sunday Call Meeting started calling around to find out if there was any truth to the call meeting being cancelled. On Thanksgiving afternoon, Pastor Payton called my home to confirm that there would be no call meeting on the 4th Sunday in fear of something worse happening compared to the prior Sunday's occurrence. Pastor Payton promised to explain himself to us on 4th Sunday.

November 27, 2011

During the service, Dcn. Travis made the announcement that there would be no call meeting as planned today, but a call meeting six days later to determine whether the church would continue under the leadership of Pastor Cyrus Payton. Many attendees voiced their shock to hear something like a call meeting happening to possibly get rid of Pastor Payton was happening.

After the service, Pastor Payton met with Brother Amos "Baritone" Macklin, Sister Selena Davidson, Sister Gloria Henderson, Sister Hope Boykins, Sister Josephine Elliot, and myself.

Pastor Payton informed us that Sis. Boykins talked with another pastor about the 4th Sunday Call Meeting and how everything went down on the past Sunday. This pastor felt it was in the best interest of those who didn't want to involve the cops and have a

peaceful meeting to avoid any possible confrontational situations like a call meeting aimed at people thirsting for violence. After talking about the 1st Saturday in December Call Meeting, my father told everyone about the dream he had of a dark cloud hanging over the church.

Pastor Payton agreed that this was no ordinary dream. Rather, the dream was another confirmation that God's judgment was about to rain on those whose minds were warped; and having the people sitting before Pastor Payton get caught in that wrath was something God didn't want.

The meeting closed with a solemn prayer that would possibly be Pastor Payton's last inside the church's sanctuary as pastor.

Chapter 7: The December 2011 Call Meeting

Following the October 2011 Call Meeting, the Deacon Board scheduled another call meeting for five weeks later on the first Saturday in December. There, the Deacon Board hoped to settle the greatest question plaguing the church - whether or not Pastor Cyrus Payton should remain as the church's pastor. And so began the final chapter of "Schism: The Not-So-Righteous Church Story".

Emotions were obviously high as members started filing in. Suddenly, the local sheriff's car pulled into the church's parking lot. Without explaining why, the sheriff entered the church's foyer and waited there through the meeting's duration.

Deacon Dewey Holly moderated the meeting. Following a devotional period, Dcn. Holly announced that we'd vote about the church continuing under the pastoral leadership of Cyrus Payton. Stepping aside, Dcn. Holly revealed that we'd use a covered ballot box to vote rather than by a show of hands as we had done during previous votes. Dcn. Holly also made sure to emphasize that only active members could vote (members that had come to church at least once in the last month).

My father informed Dcn. Holly and everyone else who didn't know that you had to be reinstated after three months of inactivity before you can be called an "active" member according to the bylaws.

Deacons Holly, Roscoe Calhoun and Samuel Travis corrected my father by saying that the whole "...restoration/reinstatement..." thing wasn't in the bylaws.

Pastor Payton - who was sitting in the back of the church - verbally followed my father's proclamation, only to be met with the deacons and a few members telling Pastor Payton that he was wrong and shouldn't speak. Rather than start an argument with the Deacon Board, Pastor Payton took his seat.

Dcn. Holly suddenly shouted, "There will be no discussions today!"

Sister Hope Boykins told Dcn. Holly and the rest of the Deacon Board that they couldn't, "...manhandle us around, and take away our rights as members of this church. You know that's wrong."

Upset, Deacon Bill Richards explained to Sis. Boykins that they (presumably the Deacon Board) had the sheriff outside ready for people like her if someone wanted to get jumpy.

Former church trustee Allen White condemned Dcn. Richards for thinking of doing something like have a church member escorted out of the church for speaking his or her mind, "We don't need some cop in here! What's wrong with you, Deacon Board?"

Dcn Holly yelled for order with the reiteration that there would be no discussions. Sister Lily Walker tried to remind everyone about the October Call Meeting's motion to vote to keep or get rid of Pastor Payton was never followed through due to the Deacon Board leaving when the votes were being counted. Dcn. Holly refused to go into the last call meeting's happenings, asking Sister Bertha Cooke to get in position at her table in front of the choir's seating area and hand out the voting slips.

As sides started rising to cast their vote by where they were sitting, I stood up with my back facing the pulpit. Members that walked down the aisle had to look at me staring back at them. Several, such as Brother Herbert Jacobs and Sister Ester Harris refused to make eye contact. When my father went to vote, he told Sis. Cooke that what was happening here was wrong.

Sis. Cooke hastily responded with a, "Un-un."

Without the knowledge of what I had done by picking my seat in the middle aisle near the front pew, I found myself as the final voter. I slowly left my position, grabbing a voting slip. Looking at the piece of paper with the words "Stay" and "Leave" waiting to be circled, I approached the ballot box before tearing the paper in half. I placed the "Stay" half of his torn slip above the ballot box's only opening, and "Leave" below the slot.

As Dcn. Calhoun and Sis. Cooke asked if I wasn't voting, I turned to everyone I watched secretly vote before saying, "I'm man enough to say how I'm voting! I vote he stays! And if any of you has the guts enough to stand up to say what vote they did, then do so!"

Immediately, Sister Coreen Richards - Deacon Bill Richards' wife - stood and admitted that she voted for Pastor Payton to go. Suddenly, everyone started rising from their seats to say how he or she voted. Deacons Holly and Calhoun yelled for order, with Dcn. Calhoun asking the church to pray with him.

When Dcn. Calhoun's prayer for God to work through the vote concluded, Dcn. Holly said he needed a Trustee Board member and a Deacon Board member to come to the back to count the votes alongside Sis. Cooke. The pro-Pastor Payton members insisted someone who actually supported Pastor Payton should tally the votes as well, choosing Associate Minister Zachary Toliver to be that person. As the counters entered the Dining Room, Dcn. Holly told everyone if they wanted to leave they could do so.

My father spoke for the members, "No, we're good right here."

Nearly ten minutes passed when the vote counters returned from the Dining Room. Bro. Toliver's eyes were noticeably red as he approached me. Sis. Cooke handed Dcn. Holly the results on a piece of paper.

Dcn. Holly read the final numbers, "The vote tallied ... forty-eight to leave, thirty-two to stay, effective today."

The stunned reactions verbalized themselves around the room.

Sis. Walker was horribly upset over the situation, telling everyone, "(The church) has gone straight to f***ing Hell."

Sis. Cooke immediately screamed, "Now you understand how faith works! That's nobody but Satan!"

Sister Rebecca Stevenson replied to Sis. Cooke, "You are Satan!" before leaving.

The celebration began for the anti-Cyrus Payton voters as Sis. Cooke almost had a breakdown in the middle of the church, yelping, "God got his church back!"

So many smiles and hugs were shared at the front of the church as several members tried to console the now-former pastor. I stood before everyone, filming the celebration ceremony with my digital camera.

Comments such as, "The devil is gone," were the norm during this filming session.

Only ten or so minutes later, Brother Melvin Adams took it upon himself to take down the picture of the church's former pastor and his wife that adorned the foyer's wall facing the church's front doors.

The upheaval of Pastor Cyrus Payton created a complete schism in the church that saw no more than half of its most loyal members leave. Thanks to the encouragement of many of those same wayward members, Pastor Payton took it upon himself to lead church services at various venues throughout December and January of the following year. By February, the congregation came together in purchasing a space not far from the church they left, creating their own church with Cyrus Payton as pastor (a church I too am now a member of).

The original church continued on while using a circulating group of ministers and evangelists to fill the roll of Pastor Payton on a weekly basis. During this time, Bro. Herbert Jacobs was named Associate Minister, though no official minister has been named as of this writing.

Though there have been no collaborations between the churches since the formation of the new church, one can hope that cooler heads will eventually prevail; learning from their mistakes, and God's children can come together in fellowship once again.

The End