

Church of God, The Eternal

P. O. Box 775
Eugene, Oregon 97401

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Dear Brethren:

Greetings again. Where does time fly? It seems that I just finished the last letter. Here it is, time for the next one. It is always a privilege to write you and serve in this capacity, but sometimes it is difficult to find sufficient time to accomplish all that needs to be done. I cannot help but believe that that priceless commodity, TIME, simply evaporates anymore. In a sense that is good. We are admonished to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." How can one possibly pray that prayer without desiring to see the times of turmoil and strife come and go quickly? As I look about and see the mental anguish, frustration, wretchedness generated in families because of change and a host of other related problems, I am deeply saddened. I could wish, a thousand times over if it would do any good, that we were all united in spirit and love of God's Truth. Instead? Because of iniquity, the love of many shall wax cold (Matt. 24:12). Too many people focus-in on the sins and vileness of others, instead of on the perfection and beauty of God's Truth. Or, as was true in the case of Pilate, they are asking, "What is Truth?" From the time of our call, baptism and confident beginning — a matter of merely a few years — so many have lost the knowledge God gave to them. They no longer trust their beginning. They have confidence in nothing — except self. And, frankly, that is the last place where we should place any confidence at all.

I wish there were a way by which I could convincingly convey the need to be faithful — to trust in your beginning. At this point in time, I know of none. I have prayed and will pray that God will be merciful — giving His true children a miraculous impetus and a sense of direction. Yes, I know there are some who have decreed a willing obedience in their own personal lives. But, that "some" is far too few. Future trials and tests will continue to test those who, for the present, are faithful. The past few years are very indicative of this. The final proof is found in "endurance to the end." Jesus said, ". . . he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13). If we really possess faith — if we really believe — we will make it to the end.

How do you stand, in terms of faith? Now is the time to take inventory. If the need exists, it is necessary to make revisions now. Do not let the "oil" of faith dissipate to dangerously low levels.

For this month's letter, I will write about the question of "Doctrine versus Administration." This concept seems to be confusing to some. Yet, it is the understanding of this very principle which allowed me to understand what was taking place within the Worldwide Church of God and what I had to do about it. I do not mind saying that, when it became necessary for me to decide between Truth and the organization, it was the most difficult decision I ever had to make. At the very heart of that decision was the understanding of administration in contrast to basic doctrine (the revealed Word of God). I hope I can make the concept plain and simple in this letter and in following issues.

I. Why the Need to Explain?

Many questions have been raised. Is not administration a part of the revealed Truth of God? Is not government, as exercised in the past, a part of the revealed way of life? By changing administration, have we not changed the truth to which we were initially called — that which we accepted and for which we were baptized? Is not a rigid form of government necessary to keep the Church pure and untainted in the world? Administration involves government! What kind of government is acceptable to God? Or, is this a time in which every man does that which is right in his own eyes? Is there no centralized responsibility — no government? Is the ministry a thing of the past? What are the answers?

People with questions deserve answers. But, please do not approach the subject with prejudice and preconceived answers. If such is the case, anything said will be of little value. I wish to approach the subject honestly and candidly, from the Bible. Will you do the same?

II. What Is Doctrine?

The basic Greek word for "doctrine" is DIDASKO. It is a primitive verb, meaning "to teach." The other cognates derived from this basic root word are DIDACHE — which means the doctrine or that which was taught — and DIDASKALIA, which is translated as instruction, doctrine, teaching or learning.

The questions: What doctrine? Whose teaching? And, is that teaching absolute, unalterable? If so, how can we be absolutely assured we believe and practice the doctrine? Or, are there other acceptable concepts and beliefs? How can we know?

First, the Bible plainly states that Jesus Christ brought His doctrine — His teachings (Matt. 7:28 and 22:33). The people were amazed — astonished — at His teachings. Why? Because He taught as one having authority. His

doctrine was absolute! How different from the interpretations, probabilities, "maybes" or "the way I see it" explanations of the religionists of His day. Christ spoke with absolute authority!

How could He do it? What was the premise of His conviction — His belief? Was the basis of His conviction the empty, senseless, incongruous and inconsistent rationale of human beings? How could Jesus affront the Jewish society of His day with inflexible, unalterable dogma? Surely His appearance was of greater moment, significance and import than any or all human relationships combined. For He spoke with absolute authority, though what He said countered nearly all the accepted concepts of His day. He was sure and emphatic.

Why was Christ so confident?

The apostle John records this statement of Jesus Christ — "I am the way, the truth, and the life . . ." (John 14:6). His life was the living and breathing Word of God. He was the very Word personified (John 1:14). Jesus Christ was the living teaching — the completeness of the doctrine — of God. The true doctrine is the Word of God — the Word personified in the life of Jesus Christ.

How important is it for us to KNOW the doctrine? Are human interpretations, reasonings and changes acceptable to God? The apostle John wrote, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (II John 9).

How abundantly clear! The doctrine had to be first given. Then, any called and chosen servant of God is morally obligated to continue in the doctrine. He cannot change it. Why? Because to have the true doctrine, one must have Christ dwelling in him. For, Christ is the doctrine. And Christ does not change.

Note carefully the following texts:

I Timothy 6:3 — Paul said some men ". . . teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness . . ."

Acts 15:35 — "Paul also and Barnabas . . . [were] teaching and preaching the word of the Lord. . . ."

Acts 18:11 — ". . . he [Paul] continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."

Colossians 3:16 — "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another"

III. Christ's Doctrine

The true doctrine is the Word of Christ. It is the way of life which He brought into existence — the way of life which He lived in His own fleshly body. And that Word has been recorded for our admonition and learning — in the Bible. But, has not the Bible been subjected to the interpretations of men? How can we know the absolute doctrine of Christ?

We know that the true, chosen servants of Christ must abide in His doctrine. But, somehow we must come to recognize the true doctrine of Christ and continue faithfully therein. Further, we must understand the premise of Christ's doctrine. From where did He get His teaching?

Christ's doctrine came from the Father — the ultimate authority. Jesus said, ". . . My doctrine [didache] is not mine, but his that sent me" (John 7:16). The premise for Christ's words was the teaching of the Father. There was no guesswork. It was absolute! He knew that God, as His Father, had commissioned Him to preach the Truth — the unalterable Word of life. This was the reason He spoke with such conviction, confidence and assurance. God had given Him the very words He was authorized to speak (John 12:49-50; Deut. 18:15-20). And, Jesus Christ did not speak presumptuously, arrogating title or office to Himself. He was commissioned and sent by the Father (John 9:3-4; 8:42-47; 12:49). His doctrine was absolute! It was perfect! It could not be altered or changed. God the Father is perfect. His way is perfect. Perfection cannot be improved upon. It is ultimate — absolute! It is not subject to change or alteration.

There is no room to question the commission or message of Jesus Christ. He was sent by God the Father. His message — the Words of life — were given to Him. He preached to the people of His day that which the Father had given to Him. But the question arises, What about people subsequent to the time of Christ? To whom should they listen, and what assurance do they have that they are hearing the words of the Father?

Jesus Christ gave His disciples a long-range commission
"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]" But, what were they to teach — and for how long? Jesus continues, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19-20). Those commissioned were to preach the very same words taught by Jesus Christ. And the words which Jesus taught were not His own, but those of the Father. Not the transition! The Father commissioned Christ to preach the Truth — words of life — then Jesus commissioned His appointed ministry to preach the same truth,

identically, which He received of the Father. And for how long? All the way to the end of the age — the time designated as the return of Jesus Christ, His second coming.

That Truth has never changed. The same words are to be spoken at all times — from the days of Christ's first appearance in human form, until His second coming as a divine spirit being.

But who is to preach that way? Only those commissioned of God! When one is commissioned to preach the Truth, it is predicated on the fact that the Truth is first given to that chosen servant. Notice Jesus' prayer, just before His death, burial, resurrection and ascension to the Father's throne. He prayed, "As thou has sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). This commission cannot be limited to the twelve apostles — because, as restated in Matthew 28:19-20, the commission to His chosen ministry was until the second coming. The twelve apostles died long before the present era. Did the commission of Jesus Christ fail? Of course not! The commission was to all those servants chosen and specifically sent by Christ and God the Father. And that commission is valid until the return of Jesus Christ. The words contained in it are the same words Jesus Christ taught when He was on this earth in human form. They have never changed and never will, for they are perfect and eternal. They are spirit and they are life.

How, then, can we receive that way of life? How can we know that we are the chosen of God?

Jesus said to His chosen disciples, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." And what were His commandments? The words of God — the true doctrine — words which were from the Father. Continuing, He said, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:15-18).

By the Holy Spirit, Christ would return to His chosen servants. He would take up His abode in them. By being in them, the unchanging Word of God was resident within each disciple. Christ was that Word. He was the doctrine of God, personified. By giving His Spirit, the life of Christ — the Doctrine, the Truth, the Word of life — could be within us. And if we do not have that Spirit within, we are none of His (Rom. 8:9).

First, God must choose those to whom He will reveal the eternal way of life — those who are destined to receive Christ, the Word of Life. To those chosen, God gives the way of life — the doctrine. The chosen receive that

Truth through the power of divine revelation. Therefore, we can know we are the recipients of the true doctrine.

Jesus continued: "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:20-21).

At that day (the return of Christ), we shall KNOW that Christ is in us! How? Whatever Christ was in His own fleshly body was to be maintained and preserved in His Church, until His second coming. Not through His own personal existence, but by His Spirit. For, He said it was expedient for Him to die, be resurrected and ascend to the Father. Yet we are told, "at that day ye shall KNOW that I am . . . in you."

Christ promised to return in the power of the Holy Spirit (compare John 14:17 and 18) and take up His abode in the chosen ones. And what was Christ? The true doctrine! The very Word of God (compare John 1:14 and 14:6). As God empowered Him with the message (John 14:10) and commissioned Him to preach, so He empowered those He had chosen (John 17:18). And the commission Christ gave was to be valid at the very day of His return (Matt. 28:19-20 and John 14:20). There is to exist a certified ministerial responsibility in the last days — the days just prior to His return. And the manifest proof of that responsibility is its identical nature to the life and commission of Christ when He was here on this earth in the flesh. Its operation is the continuation of that mission given to Christ. The doctrine taught by Christ — which He also practiced — is continued in our day, through the power of the Spirit in His chosen subjects.

Considering the above, it is not surprising to understand why Judas (not Iscariot) was puzzled. He could not understand the spiritual implications. How could the disciples see the manifested Body of Christ (after His ascension and a promised return), but human beings of the world could not? The answer is in understanding what Christ was — yes, what He is NOW, has been and always will be. The people of His day recognized Him as a human being — the son of Mary. But what they could not grasp was the profound fact that He was the doctrine, the Word of God personified, the very Son of God! In like manner, only those who understand in the last days will truly recognize Christ. He is present, in the lives of those not recognized by the masses. The requirements for such recognition (understanding) today are exactly the same as those in His own day.

In John 14:23-24, Jesus gave the answer to the puzzling question of Judas. He said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words [the doctrine, teaching given by the Father] . . . and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings [the doctrine]: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." More

than words are required for proof. Jesus said that the proof of our love for Him was the manifestation of implicit obedience to the doctrine of the Father, preached and practiced by Himself and continued in the last days in the lives of His chosen servants!

Concerning the last days, let us ask, "How can we know — be assured of — the doctrine which Jesus Christ taught?" Jesus answers that very question, in verse 26 of John 14. He says, ". . . the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost [Spirit], whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." When? Not only then, to the chosen twelve, but as Christ said in verse 20 — "At that day" — the day of Christ's return. This is a promise to you and me. A promise that the Holy Spirit would bring to our attention all that Jesus Christ taught when He was here on the earth in the flesh. He would teach, through His Spirit, the unalterable doctrine — the same doctrine which He taught as a commission from His Father in His own day, almost 2,000 years ago.

How was that message to be taught? How would His chosen people come to know — to hear — that profound Truth?

IV. The True Ministry

A true ministry was to be chosen. The Bible makes this abundantly clear. We must remember that God said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Therefore, we must apply the following texts to ourselves.

In John 15:16, Jesus told the twelve disciples that they had not chosen Him but that He had chosen them. He said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you" Salvation is the operation of God. It is the business of God the Father. But the Father committed the total responsibility to the Son, Jesus Christ. In no way can human beings assume prerogatives, with respect to that commission. Being totally responsible, Christ chooses whom He pleases — and for whatever duties He determines. The ministry is a chosen ministry. And in the broad sense, all called to salvation must be chosen of God.

As Christ chose the twelve to carry out specific responsibilities in the first-century Church of God, so He will call and appoint responsible servants for a work of the last days. God does not change. Neither does His method of operation. If He changed, then there would be little relevancy to the Bible. It would be a mere historical record. On the contrary, however, the Bible is the living Word of God. It is eternally true — accurate and relevant. Therefore, no man has the right to assume a responsibility as a minister. He must be called and commissioned. Also, every servant of God must be called to

understand the Truth. And when the Truth is given to God's chosen servants — whether ministry or laity — all are morally responsible for faithful continuity in that charge.

What are God's chosen ministers to teach? For what are they being held responsible? Jesus succinctly explained the charge, in John 15:15. He said, ". . . all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." How clear! Jesus received His message from the Father. In turn, He called and commissioned ministerial servants who were taught the same truth. That which had been delivered to them, they were authoritatively bound to proclaim to the people. And that word which was delivered to them was the Truth (John 17:17).

In like manner, the apostle Paul had been called and commissioned. He wrote to his helper Timothy the following: "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust" (I Tim. 1:9-11).

Paul, like the twelve apostles, was called and commissioned by Jesus Christ. The message had been delivered to them. They were held accountable for the truth which had been given. The people who heard that way of life, through their preaching, judged by those very words. That is how binding and absolute truth is. And the Bible makes it very clear that there would be such a responsibility to truth in the last days (Matt. 28:19-20). The Bible stands absolute to all generations. Truth is given, Christ's servants commissioned, people called to hear, and judgment promised on the basis of what is taught.

The doctrine taught by the apostles (including the apostle Paul) was the same as that taught by Jesus Christ. The words taught by Christ were not His own, but the very words of the Father. In Acts 2:41-42, the Truth is called the apostles' doctrine. Luke wrote, "Then they that gladly received his [Peter's] word were baptized And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" Where did they get the message? From Jesus Christ. And from whom did Jesus Christ get the Truth? From the Father. And that is finality.

What did Paul teach? Was his message different from that proclaimed by the original twelve apostles? Absolutely not! Luke wrote, "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord" (Acts 13:12). What was the Lord's doctrine? That which he had been given by the Father. And what was the doctrine taught by the twelve aspostles?

The same doctrine Jesus Christ taught. Therefore, the doctrine taught by the apostle Paul and the twelve apostles was one and the same. And that doctrine was none other than the gospel which Jesus Christ brought to light.

But what about the time following the preaching of the apostles? Was the same doctrine to be carried on faithfully to the end? Jesus Christ said, "Teaching them [future disciples] to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19). Paul was inspired to write, ". . . the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2). True doctrine does not change. The way God works, in making Truth known, does not change. It is only men, with the proclivity for aberration and unfaithfulness, who change. Let us admit the verity of God, and let all men be liars. So says the Bible.

In God's own time, He chooses and commissions servants to proclaim the Truth. The responsibility of those chosen is to teach others, appointing some to carry out the preaching of Truth without deviation. As Paul said, ". . . faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Note the instruction given in I Timothy 4:16. Great care must always be exercised.

The chosen ministry must consistently preach that true doctrine delivered to them. They must be faithful servants. But what about the people who hear the voice of Christ through His chosen ministry? What is their moral obligation?

To the Roman church Paul wrote, ". . . ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." And what doctrine was delivered to them? Paul said he delivered the same doctrine which was committed to him. And in transmitting that responsibility Paul said to the young evangelist, Timothy, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things [that which had been committed to Paul's trust], thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine . . ." (I Tim. 4:6).

The people, as well as the ministry, are to be faithful to the Truth revealed to them. The true doctrine cannot change. It is spirit — it is eternal. But what people have done with it is almost incomprehensible. Let us note the depth of the subtlety of man.

V. Human Tendencies

What are the human tendencies? They are a reflection of the subtleties of the carnal nature. To understand these proclivities is to have a healthy fear and respect for the Word of God. Let us thoroughly understand. Let us examine ourselves in the light of these tendencies, not attempting to relegate them to others as a means of avoiding guilt when we are in error.

In Ephesians 4:14 Paul wrote, "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" Some are willing to turn from truth and teach others error. On the other hand, the people are only too willing to listen to heresy — to be carried about with differing doctrines.

Paul further instructs, in I Timothy 1:3-4, "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith"

Paul continues his instruction to Timothy, in verses 5-7, "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm."

What did they turn from? The Gospel which was committed to Paul's trust (verse 11).

Let us note a number of other examples. It will become most obvious that man's natural bent is not to faithfulness, but rather to corruption — even corruption of the Truth which God entrusts to them.

Paul instructs Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (I Tim. 4:16).

As Paul instructed young Timothy, so he taught and encouraged Titus. He wrote, "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (Titus 2:7-8).

In all respects, man tends to drift from the Truth. The Bible is a chronicle of man's receiving the Truth and subsequently departing. Regardless of the time periods — whether before or after the time of Christ — human nature has not changed. Man seems incapable of loyalty to the Truth. God's way is contrary to the makeup of human beings. Man is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be. His inherent nature is at variance with God. It is man's task to overcome that tendency — to master the proclivity of treating God's Truth with disrespect. Yet, so few have ever really mastered themselves — even with the help of God. Relative to the way of life, Christ said, ". . . few there be that find it."

People often subject themselves to the whims of those who are more dominant in their rationale. But if this rationale is not the revealed Truth of

God, the natural tendency will be to vacillate — to be carried about with every wind of doctrine. Because of deception and natural lusts, changes appear to be so logical and acceptable. Being rooted and firmly established upon an unmovable foundation is impossible, unless one first respects the Word of God — the true doctrine. Those who respect and love the Truth will refuse to respond to deceivers, who often subtly insinuate change for advantage — personally or organizationally. Paul said to Titus, "Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth" (Titus 1:14). The absolute is the doctrine — the Truth. It is unchanging. From that premise, the activities and beliefs of all men can be judged. Men may change, but the Truth of God remains unalterable. If we had been thoroughly engrained with this concept, we should have had little difficulty in evaluating the problems of the past few years. Traumas and doubts came because of an unsure foundation. But there is only one absolute and sure foundation. It is the revealed Word of God — the truth which was received through the Church of God. Why should we doubt? We should have not one single doubt, for God said that Church would exist in the last days. There was no other church which believed and practiced all the principles of the Bible — both Old and New Testaments.

Servants of God are not free from pressures to change or alter their charge. Some of the men bearing such responsibility have failed. Their lives and circumstances are recorded as a warning to others. A call and commission does not insure faithfulness. Faithfulness is the sole responsibility of the man involved. He can either make the determination to be faithful or allow himself to be deceived. And the avenues in which deception can be expressed are unlimited. A position or office can seem more significant than the message commissioned by God. Lusts can become so dominant that the Truth will be altered to accommodate those lusts. Paul told Titus, "Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake" (Titus 1:11). No doubt, these irresponsible servants deceived themselves into believing they were honest and doing the right thing. But the apostle Paul knew their motive. We can be assured that these men did not tell the people the reason they were preaching. To have manifested such honesty would have destroyed their effectiveness with the people. How, then, can one know whom to believe? Honesty with the Word of God committed to them is the one and only required proof. If a minister will remain faithful to the Word — the doctrine — it is an absolute proof of his willingness to subjugate self and in turn honor God.

Why?

Because the natural man is enmity against God — he is not subject to the Law of God, and cannot be. Therefore, when he obeys the Word of God entrusted to him, there is inherent proof of his acceptance of the Truth, receipt of the Holy Spirit, personal mastery in his own life, continuing love for the Truth and willingness to suffer for that Truth when the need arises.

The past struggles ought to prepare us for the larger responsibilities of tomorrow. We should have effected significant changes in our personal lives. We should have greater respect and love for the Truth. And we should be prepared to go on — not look back, but go on to ultimate perfection. Growth is the process of adding to the faith which has been previously given.

In this connection, let us notice a comparable situation in the first century. Paul wrote, regarding the brethren in Jerusalem: "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:11-14).

By change, the process of growth has been reversed. Instead of growing up into Christ — into greater perfection — those who subscribe to the concept of change are growing backward out of the Truth. By careful observation, one can see that such is the case with those who have accepted doctrinal changes. The dismantling of the Truth has continued from the day it was initiated until this very day — and will continue as long as the erroneous philosophy which precipitated the changes continues.

Human tendencies — in relation to the Truth — are well documented, both historically and prophetically.

VI. Results: Doctrines of Men and Demons

As these doctrines have manifested themselves in the past, so have they become most apparent in our time. We are living into the very time of the fulfillment of many of the general prophecies which relate to revelation of Truth and apostasy in the last days. We have seen these things come to pass. But, what can we expect to be the natural results of turning away from the divinely revealed Truth? What may we see transpire? Once men turn on a downward path from the Truth, they do not remain static. Some action will be apparent. The Bible is the history of God's chosen who turned from their responsibilities — turned to concepts of their own choosing. Let us see how the repetition affects our own time!

First, let us remember that God gave the Truth to the people of Israel in the time of Moses. There was no progressive revelation — evidenced by change. Truth was given initially, and the children of Israel were required to live up to it. They could not change it, under any circumstances.

But, how long did Israel honor their contract with God? In a matter of days, they had rebelled against God. They could not, and would not, tolerate

the constraints which God had imposed upon them. They wanted freedom — the privilege to do whatever they thought was right. But, of course, they continued to lay claim to "their" God, saying they were the people of the Eternal.

From time to time, major reformations took place. Responsible leaders would exercise authority and bring the people back to God. Then, for a time the nation would flourish, grow stable and prosperous and exist in peace. But not for long. Soon the nature of man would again dominate. The chosen people would rebel — commit spiritual harlotry — and wind up in captivity. This pattern continued for several hundred years — until the time of Christ.

Christ was that prophet, promised to come, who would be like Moses (Deut. 18:15). He would teach exactly the same thing taught by Moses (John 5:43-47). But what kind of religious atmosphere did Jesus find in Judea — in the church of the wilderness? The oracles of God had been committed to them. They were privileged above all peoples. They were the possessors of the greatest gift man could receive. They had been given the one and only way of life. What had they done to it?

In Christ's day, the Pharisees sat in the seat of Moses (Matt. 23:1-2). Incumbent upon them was the spiritual responsibility of teaching the Truth — the laws, statutes and judgments of God. But what were they doing? Were they faithful to their responsibility?

Jesus said to His disciples, whom He was training, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6). The disciples did not understand. Therefore, Jesus said to them, "How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:11-12). Those chargeable by God, for the Truth, were not faithful. They had progressively altered and changed the Truth into a lie. They had established a doctrine which was suitable to them. The people to whom the Truth had been given could not be faithful — they had manifested no continuity of purpose, even when that purpose involved the very Truth of God. They did not remain static. They generated a system of doctrine of their own, while laying claim to the name of God and their physical relationship with Him. In their own minds, they felt they were the true people of God. Thus, anyone who dared condemn them for their beliefs (in this case, Jesus Christ) had to be an imposter and worthy of death.

Heretics do not normally disappear into anonymity. On the contrary, every effort is generally expended to create an embodiment of doctrine which reflects their aspirations and hopes. The Pharisees and Sadducees were no different. Jesus said they had evolved a religious philosophy unique to themselves. He said: ". . . Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God

by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:3-9; compare Mark 7:6-9). When people depart from the Truth, in order to assuage their consciences, they generally create doctrines of their own. The natural human tendency is to depart from the Truth. Once human beings depart, they set about to establish a self-atoning system. Though the name of God is used, the vast majority of religious concepts extant today are none other than the creations of specific individuals (John 5:43-44). But, the doctrine of God is singular. The Body of Christ is not divided — it is one. How, then, can the conflicting doctrines of churchianity today be indicative of the Body of Christ? Indeed, they cannot be. For, most professing Christians readily admit that their practices are not the same as those practiced and taught by Jesus Christ. Their belief is that what Christ taught was prior to His death and therefore a part of the Old Testament — not of the New Covenant. Yet, it is plain what Moses taught and what Jesus Christ taught. What Christ taught, He conveyed to His disciples — who, in turn, taught those who followed them. The words which Jesus taught are the ones which must be taught by the chosen ministry of Christ until His second coming. Confusion is rampant today because men have generated doctrines of their own and people are willing to follow. This whole travesty is profound evidence of the result of apostatizing from the Truth. Departure from Truth inevitably results in the generation of doctrines of men.

Paul taught the church at Colossae, "Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?" (Colossians 2:22.) Men may generate doctrines of their own, but the fate of such doctrines is inevitable. They will perish. One who allows himself to drift into error is not likely to catch himself before it is too late. Usually, the mind is conditioned to the change until it appears logical and completely acceptable. Therefore, a foundational premise is imperative. The revealed Word of God will be given but one time, and the necessary faith to believe unto salvation must be kept strong by daily contact with God and by the accompanying negation of self.

As strong as human nature is — in terms of self-justification — it is by no means the most significant influence. Unless we are active spiritually and maintain faith in the truth revealed, an unseen enemy will sow seeds of discord and doubt. A gradual eroding of the Truth is not often noticed by the majority of people. And without realizing it, the chosen people of God will be sublimely listening to the voice of Satan the Devil. Paul warned, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times [our very day] some shall

depart from the faith [that which was once believed], giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [demons]; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (I Tim. 4:1-2). The chosen servants of God may not be aware of the Devil, but he is ever present. He is opposed to any who believe in revealed Truth. His purpose is to destroy faith — to impugn and ridicule the Truth and those who believe it. Those who do not maintain strong faith and conviction will tend to compromise. One step leads to the next. In process of time, the whole fabric of Truth will be rejected. It is only those remaining faithful to that which they have been taught — the faith once delivered — who will be saved. But, many will ask, how can one know the true doctrine — the absolute Truth of God? Let us understand!

VII. How to Know the Doctrine

Jesus said, ". . . I am the way, the truth, and the life . . ." (John 14:6). He said, ". . . thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Jesus Christ was the Word made flesh (John 1:14). He was the physical embodiment of the very words of God. What the people saw and heard in Him was the Truth — the true doctrine of God — lived and preached. Merely accepting the person of Jesus is not adequate. What is required is the acceptance of Him as the Word Incarnate. But how many human beings can accept this? Of their own volition, NONE! Acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Word of God personified, is an act of faith. It can be understood by revelation only. For Jesus said: ". . . I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt. 11:25-27).

To know the true doctrine — the Word of God — is to know the Son. And to know the Son requires a miraculous revelation. Only to those called of God will the Son be revealed. Paul emphasized this when he said, ". . . the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14). The natural man will not — indeed cannot — know the Truth. He must first be called to know and understand. Then, once he is called, he must remain faithful to that call or he will lose faith and begin to corrupt Truth.

What, then, is the proof? How can human beings know?

Those called, only, will know the Truth! There will be no doubt in their minds when they are called. A miracle transpires. They know that way of life — and they know that they know. Others are amazed and perplexed, often ridiculing in disbelief. But, that does not alter what has happened. Those

called of God know they are His servants. But they must ever be on guard, for once they begin to lose faith — turning to strange and diverse concepts — they cannot be relied upon for spiritual insight. They have become blinded and lose sight of who they are. Note what happened in the church at Corinth. Members of the Corinthian church had begun to pervert the Truth. Some demanded to know the proof of Paul's ministry. The same question is being asked today. How can anyone know the Truth? Paul's answer was, ". . . need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (II Cor. 3:1-3). Despite the fact they had begun to doubt, they were the living proof of the way of life — the truth God had revealed to the apostle Paul, who in turn delivered it to the people. In exactly the same way, those today who have repudiated the Truth of God cannot deny their initial response. They were called and given the Truth of God. They were baptized for that way of life. They knew and they knew they knew. They were willing to sacrifice their lives for that Truth. That historical fact is written in the sands of time. It cannot be altered, changed or denied. Therefore, the people of the Church of God — from 1934 to 1974 — are a manifestation of the Truth — the way of life. They are, and will always be, a living proof of that way of life. They are a historical fact!

The unconverted cannot understand. Spiritual understanding must be by divine revelation. Therefore, the testimony which counts comes from those once called. They were united in belief for forty years. Wretched human failures, subsequently exposed, do not alter the validity of that Truth.

All who were called and chosen of God knew the doctrine (II Tim. 3:10). They had no doubts until sins were exposed. But, the sins of others do not change the Truth of God. God is not responsible for the failures of the ministry.

How did we know the Truth? By living it! Christ said, ". . . by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). Christ elaborated on this principle, in John 7:17. He said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." We all knew it. We lived it. We did the will of God. We saw the results of that way of life. We had no doubts.

But, look what has happened to God's Church since that fateful time of change. It has been literally torn asunder. Factions of every variety have sprung up from that initial body. Yet, there is a small handful who still tenaciously cling to the faith once delivered — that belief which was once practiced by all. Those who still cling to any of the teachings of the Church are admitting, by their actions, that the doctrine was true and that the body was the Church of God.

There is no reason to doubt, even today. We can KNOW. Jesus said, ". . . he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). To manifest means to make obvious. But, obvious to whom? To those who know and understand. We knew the Truth when we were called and lived it. If it were the Truth at the time we accepted it, then it is impossible for any doctrinal change to be the Truth. For, Truth is absolute — it is perfection, which defies change. Thus, the present changes cannot be Truth. Furthermore, an added indictment is this: The initial changes (made in 1973-1974) are no longer accepted beliefs. They have also been changed. Why? Because the premise of Truth — the power and influence of the Holy Spirit — is no longer guiding. Change is not the manifestation of the Spirit of God. It is the proof of carnality — the proof change is not of God.

Was Jesus manifest in the Church from 1934 to 1974? If not, then the Church was none of His. If He were manifest, then that doctrine — the Word — must not be changed!

What true doctrine, then, was manifested by the Church? Paul, writing to the Romans, said, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime [the Old Testament] were written for our learning [doctrine: the Greek word is didaskalia, which means doctrine or teaching] . . ." (Rom. 15:4). The doctrine of the Church of God, in the last days, includes the writings of the Old Testament. The only part of God's Word which is excluded is that specifically mentioned by Paul — the sacrifices, washings and carnal ordinances. Only one church practiced and lived all those truths — the true doctrine. Indeed, the life of Christ, the Word of God, was manifest in His Church. Having been manifested, the true doctrine is not subject to change. See Hebrews 13:8-9. Christ is the Word. And the Word of God given to Christ is the doctrine. Then Christ, as the doctrine personified, cannot change! Thus we are admonished, "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince [convict] the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9). John wrote, ". . . the anointing [receipt of the Holy Spirit] which ye have received of him abideth in you . . . but as the same anointing teacheth you all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (I John 2:27). The Truth is the way of life to which we were called — that which we received at the beginning. And we are held responsible, by God, for faithful adherence ("shall abide in him") to that way which we were initially taught.

The faithful will KNOW the Truth — they will not have forgotten what they were taught. Those of the world cannot know, for it has not been revealed to them. Those who turn from the way become blinded and are no longer capable of determining the Truth. The blind are incapable of spiritual insight.

VIII. Why Need to Test the Servants of God

Men are fallible. Even with a divine call or responsibility, they remain fallible. They can err. The Bible is a long chronicle of human servants, called and chosen of God, who for various reasons turned from the way of life.

Because of this fallibility, God instructs us to put no trust in men. How, then, can the people know those who teach the Truth? By one consideration only: the unchanging Truth of God. God does not change. When God reveals His way of life, He reveals the Truth. It then becomes the responsibility of both ministers and lay members to remain faithful to the Truth. Whether minister or lay person, it is a very easy task to examine and know the faithful. Who remains loyal to the Truth as he was taught?

Why does the need of testing (evaluating) one another exist? In the last days, perilous times will prevail (II Tim. 3:1). We are told, ". . . evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (II Tim. 3:13). Chaos will reign in the Church. Heresy will dominate. But you can confidently live the Christian life. Paul admonishes, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (II Tim. 3:14). We are told to continue, in the last days, in the doctrine (the total Word of God, verse 16) which we were taught. It is the revealed Word which is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (verse 16).

Paul emphasizes the necessity of careful evaluation. Relative to the last days, he wrote: "Preach the Word" (that which he had been taught). Urgency prevails! Why? "For the time will come [in the last days] when they [the people] will not endure sound doctrine [that word revealed by God]; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers [ministers who are willing to compromise faith for position, money, prestige or fear], having itching ears; And they [the people and the ministers] shall turn away their ears from the truth [truth came first, and heresy followed], and shall be turned unto fables [concepts from the imaginations of the heart and 'certified' by so-called scholarship]" (II Tim. 4:3-4).

What could be a more imperative reason for careful evaluation? For those who desire to individualize, one criterion — and one criterion only — stands absolute. It is the beginning Truth which we were taught.

Those who preach the Truth must live by it. And those who claim to be Christians must live up to the basic tenets of that way of life (Rom. 2:17-24). To leave one impression with the people while living another is utter hypocrisy. A hypocrite has no favor with God.

The basis for testing minister and lay member alike is twofold. One, each must live the Truth as he was taught. And, two, each must live the truth in his life. A Christian must strive to be a person of unrepachable character.

IX. Should We Follow Men Who Turn From True Doctrine?

The Bible says that, in the last days, many true ministers will turn from the Truth. The closing days of this era of time cannot come unless there first occurs a major apostasy. When apostasy occurs, should one follow those who apostatize for the sake of name or Church?

Paul wrote to Titus, "Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men [the result of human tendencies], that turn [once knew] from the truth" (Titus 1:14). Those who turned from the truth — did they give up religion? "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (Titus 1:16).

We are admonished not to heed anyone who turns from the Truth and begins to teach heresy. In such situations, one must determine to obey (be loyal and faithful to) God, not men. We should not disrespect men, but we must first obey God. Circumstances today force all chosen servants of God to determine the direction of their loyalty. It is in this respect God is evaluating all — to determine those approved (I Cor. 11:19).

John makes imperative the necessity of correct evaluation. In II John we read that those called and chosen of God KNOW the Truth (II John 1). That Truth (Christ) dwells in us (verse 2). And even in the time of distress and trial, some were faithful to the Truth — were still walking in it, as they had been taught by God's true ministers (verse 4). He beseeches them to love one another in accordance with the truth received from the beginning (verses 5-6). Because deception and heresy will proliferate among brethren of the Church, all are warned to look to themselves in a very careful evaluation and examination (verses 7-8). The basis of that evaluation is a belief in the manifestation of Christ — the unchanging Word — in the fleshly lives of His chosen servants (verse 7). Those who turn from the revealed Word do not abide in the doctrine of Christ (verse 9). They are not the possessors of the life of God and Christ (verse 9). But, if we remain faithful to the initial (beginning) Word revealed by God, we have both the Father and the Son (verse 9). If They both are present in us, we belong to Them. However, if They are not in us, then we are none of Theirs.

The test is on. For, if anyone comes to you and brings not this doctrine (that given from the beginning), you are not to countenance him in any respect (verse 10). You must not follow men who depart from the Truth. God wants those who are faithful to Him — faithful to the Word of God as manifested in the life of Christ.

Paul instructed Titus, "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject" (Titus 3:10). This is instruction to a minister, but

the principle applies to anyone who begins to espouse heresy. He must be rejected. No true and faithful servant of God should follow such an infidel.

The Corinthians were told to come out and be separate from those who went into error (II Cor. 6:14-18). Truth should not coexist with heresy. Evaluate on the basis of initially revealed Truth, and avoid any who do not live up to that way of life. Here is specific proof that the faithful Corinthians were instructed to come out of the Church. The Church had gone into error. The faithful were required to leave — lest they become tainted with the error.

God must be obeyed and followed. Human beings are followed only if they remain faithful to the revealed Word of God. The test requires courage! But the factors involved are not difficult to understand.

X. Must Know The True Servants

Despite apostasies, God has always kept a remnant of faithful servants — including ministers. Elijah was not left alone. God had reserved a considerable number of servants who had not bowed the knee to Baal. In the first century, after the death of the original apostles, there were some ministers who remained faithful to their call. And the recording of these examples for our learning (doctrine, teaching) is proof that there is a faithful ministry today. It is therefore imperative, for those desiring to be loyal to God, to determine who and where those servants are. And you must remember how to make that determination. Guesswork is woefully inadequate. Prejudice and ridicule will not give positive answers. A "wait and see" attitude may be fatal. God has given us all the criteria necessary to arrive at a positive conclusion. It is our responsibility to make that effort!

Let us note a number of texts. Remember, these texts apply to us! Man must live — today, also — by every word which proceeds from God. The entirety of the Bible is the spoken Word of God. It represents the complete body and life of Christ. He was that Word made flesh.

Paul said to the Hebrews, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation [conduct]" (Heb. 13:7). Literally translated, that text in the Greek reads, "Remember your leaders, who spoke to you the word of God; of whom, considering the issue of [their] conduct, imitate [their] faith" (Englishman's Greek New Testament). If you are going to remember them and imitate their faith, you most assuredly are going to be required to know who and where they are. Throwing up one's hands in desperation will solve nothing. The details of "proving" have been laid down. All must manifest the courage and conviction to fulfill this requirement.

Paul elaborates upon the thought expressed in verse 7. In Hebrews 13:17 he writes, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Because of difficulty, trial and repudiation of the doctrine in the time of Paul, many of God's chosen were having trouble determining the faithful or submitting to them. Regardless of the problems, Paul is saying to the people, you must know the true ministers. Individualizing for the purpose of avoiding this serious responsibility is not acceptable to God. These texts apply to us. We must know the true ministers. And the true ministers must know the chosen vessels of God. How? The same test applies. In a simple statement, each is determined by faithfulness to the originally revealed doctrine. The ministers are preaching and living it. The lay members are practicing it in their daily lives.

Timothy, a minister, was told, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (I Tim. 5:17). Most definitely, you will need to know the doctrine to fulfill that Biblical command. Prerequisite to fulfilling the command is having knowledge of the doctrine. Not just doctrine, but THE doctrine. It is the doctrine which God had revealed to the apostle Paul, taught to the people and impressed upon the minds of those chosen to assist him (as his ministerial assistants).

Logically, you must do the following: 1) KNOW the doctrine. 2) By that doctrine, evaluate the ministry. 3) Submit yourselves to those who continue to preach the way of life — the doctrine. And, those who are the faithful ministers will rule well. That is, they will guide and help the people in the interest of their well-being and not for personal advantage and gain. Also, they will be living and practicing the way of life. There will be no element of hypocrisy.

In Corinthians (I Cor. 4:16-17), Paul tells the Church how to evaluate ministers taught, trained and sent by the originally chosen servants. He says, "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church."

The proof of the ministry? Those who continue in God's ways — those ways which be in Christ. And in that respect, the lay members should emulate the ministry. Paul said he could have been a castaway, but he had remained faithful to his call — a call to preach the unchanging Truth. He said he had delivered exactly what God had given to him. And the chosen members of the Body of Christ were to follow him in obedience to the revealed Truth.

Concerning the character which God requires of the ministry, note I Timothy 6:3-5. If a minister does not live up to the high and righteous

standard imposed by God, he cannot possibly lead people into righteousness. Such ministers may lead, but it will be into lustful activities, heresy and every manner of evil doing.

You must KNOW the true servants of God. Unless you know the doctrine and wisely apply it in evaluating the ministry, you cannot fulfill whole sections of God's inspired Word. Remember, you must live it — not in part, but every word of it.

Conclusion

Doctrine is the teaching of Christ. He was the living Word of God, manifested in the flesh. He was, and is, the Truth and the Way. His words were not His own, but those given by the Father.

No person can, of his own accord, come to the knowledge of who and what Christ is. Such knowledge is by revelation only. Christ was the true doctrine, personified. And that doctrine had to be revealed — not only in the time of Christ and the apostles, but also in the last days. His method of operation has never changed.

Initially, Christ taught the words — doctrine — which the Father had given Him. As He was commissioned of the Father, so He called, taught and commissioned servants who were to teach the same doctrine. He used and is still using a ministry to do His Work.

Because of human beings, the avenue was left wide open for the manifestation of carnal tendencies. And in short order, many of the ministers and the lay members turned to doctrinal perversion, lust, heresy and every evil work.

The result? A test was imperative. Only by faith and confidence in the true doctrine were the people able to chart a confident course through the troubled waters of spiritual chaos. They had to KNOW the doctrine. And they knew it because they had lived it. Even those who turned from the Truth were a living proof of doctrinal veracity. Their fruits, of the past, had proven it.

The real Truth must continue to the end. And those responsible for preaching and maintaining the Truth can be known only by using that Truth to determine them. You must KNOW those who labor among you in the Word and doctrine.

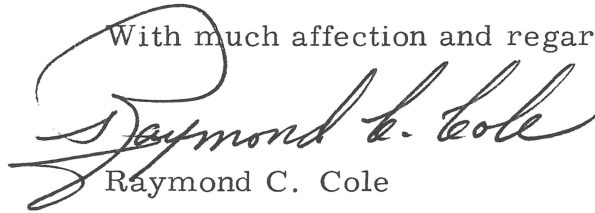
Proving the faithful ministers is your responsibility. And a significant responsibility, at that, because God's people are instructed not to follow any who turn from the Truth. The foundation (premise) upon which all evaluation hangs is the revealed doctrine. You must have faith in it.

Doctrine is imperative. It is absolute. But the whole Bible is a chronicle of how irresponsible men misused it. In that respect, both good and

bad administration is revealed. Christ's administration was good. Nearly all men have failed to properly administer, in one way or another. For a thorough and exhaustive explanation of administration, you will need to patiently await next month's letter.

I hope doctrine is made clear. It has been our joy to aid you in this understanding. So, until next time, all our love and respect.

With much affection and regard,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name. The first letter "R" is large and loops around the first part of the name.

Raymond C. Cole