

Church of God, The Eternal

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July, 1982

Dear Brethren:

The bulk of this letter is being written here in Switzerland. My wife, Myra, and I are here on our annual journey, spending time with our French-speaking brethren — to impart to them the priceless Truths of life, also. By the time you receive this letter, we will have returned to the United States and on to Eugene, July 4th.

Because of the tiring aspect of the long return journey, I decided to break up the trip by stopping over in the New York City area. This stopover will allow us to have a Sabbath service in the Delaware Water Gap — Northeastern Pennsylvania — for the brethren in the Northeast. It will be a great joy to see all of them once again. By this time of year, all are eagerly looking forward to the Feast of Tabernacles. How marvellous to spend time together with those of mutual faith and conviction. The Feast is such a great blessing. I am very sure God will work out all difficulties, making it possible for all to attend who desire to be present. It is the one time of the year when all of us can come to the appointed place and thereby come into the very presence of our God and Father. He has promised to be in those places appointed on those designated times. What a joy to be obedient to such a Father.

The economic situation, around the world, continues to deteriorate. We must be fervently and earnestly praying for one another. God will see us through the chaos and troubles of the last days. But, we must take nothing for granted. Only by praying for one another will we successfully endure. The prayers of each one are so vitally important.

Do not be troubled by the billowing clouds of turmoil omnipresent today. God is still in heaven. He knows His own called and chosen ones. He loves them very much. Our faith needs to be tried. But God will be there to guide us through ALL the difficulties if we will simply cast our cares upon Him. He is worthy of our confidence and trust.

For July, 1982, we are submitting another section of the series explaining the "Two Facets of Knowledge." Reviewing the points covered up to this time will greatly facilitate understanding the topic. The purpose, from the beginning to the end of the series, is to create a fabric of understanding regarding the relationship between spiritual and physical things, the contrast of the called and uncalled, and the real comprehension of Truth — the Word of God — versus religious presumption. Once the series is completed, the whole fabric

should be laid out in logical form from the point of beginning to the logical conclusion.

God has always existed. This we must come to believe (Heb. 11:6). By its spiritual nature, the Word of God has always existed also. It is immutable, unchangeable. But men are natural, physical, beings. They are not subject to things which are spiritual. Their knowledge and area of influence is limited to the physical realm into which they were created. A miraculous and dramatic change is essential for man to mentally comprehend anything beyond his natural limitations. That miraculous change is called conversion. It is the time when God opens the mind to spiritual things. Man begins to understand what earlier in his life was total darkness or of only passing interest. The Truth is revealed — made plain and understandable. Man, then, becomes accountable to God from a different and unique perspective. There is no turning back. Being the creation of God, man has no choice in the matter of the call. Only in acceptance, belief, and practice does man have choice. He can wholeheartedly accept. Or, he can categorically reject the initial call. For the most part, men tend to vacillate somewhere between the two ultimates just mentioned. Usually there is acceptance, fearfully, doubtfully, and wonderingly. In process of time, man grows stronger and becomes more convicted. Yet, as all history regarding the revelation of Truth shows, due to trials, difficulties, and the lustful pulls of human nature, far too many falter and fail to continue in that way to which they were called. They lose faith. Many become prey to those who espouse contrary doctrines. Division after division occurs, each equally convinced in his own eyes he is right and that God is on his side. In subtle fashion, the majority fail to remember their call or how they heard the Truth and the significance of faith.

For this month we will cover exhaustively the subject of HOW the average person comes to know and understand the Truth. Can he ferret Truth out for himself? Is his relationship exclusively a one-on-one relationship with Christ? Just how do men come to a knowledge of spiritual Truths?

X. How Do The People, In General, Hear The Truth And Respond?

Obviously, if THE TRUTH has been hidden from the beginning, it must be revealed. Logically, then, that revelation can be made known only by someone who knows and understands it. As we have seen, God makes Truth known, initially, to His chosen ministry. They are then commissioned to proclaim that only which God gives to them. No presumptive additions or editorializing is permitted. No freedom or license regarding the Word may be taken by those chosen and commissioned. The given Word only may be proclaimed. How many times has God made this abundantly clear?

According to the Bible record, someone is destined to be the recipient of that proclamation. If God has a ministry, they would not be exercising such a responsibility for nought.

The Bible clearly demonstrates they are recipients of that knowledge. They are the beneficiaries of any ordained proclamation.

XI. A Great Blessing To Hear And Understand The Truth

People generally stand in awe of any being displaying power, knowledge, insight, or other outstanding traits. Credits and laurels are often heaped upon parents of such prodigies. Such was the reaction of one woman in the days of Jesus Christ. She said, ". . . Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked" (Luke 11:27).

Rather than revel in personal exaltation, Jesus quickly countered: ". . . Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28).

Powers, gifts, insight, and knowledge are not objectives in themselves. They are vehicles by which a real purpose is accomplished. They are the means by which the proclamation of God is made — forcefully and convincingly. At best, they are secondary to the purpose for which they are initially given — a convincing acceptance of the Words of life.

The great blessing is not in HOW the Word was proclaimed but in its acceptance by responsive individuals and their subsequent wholehearted obedience. Jesus plainly said, there is a very great blessing in HEARING AND ACTING ON THE WORD.

Why?

Because FEW, INDEED, ARE CALLED TO HEAR AND UNDERSTAND.

The remainder remain in darkness — the absence of the Light of Truth because it remains hidden from them. Only by a divine call are they made capable of hearing and responding. Knowing and understanding this makes the blessing of willing ears, and responsive wills all the more blessed.

As noted, Truth is spiritual. Spiritual things are not seen. What men cannot see requires FAITH to BELIEVE and PRACTICE. For, the unconverted man does not see spiritual things. They are irrelevant to this mundane, physical, existence. Uncalled physical beings react to what they can feel, see, and touch.

How can we acquire the necessary faith to BELIEVE and REMAIN LOYAL to the Truth? Paul made this clear. He said, ". . . faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Faith is essential for salvation. To obtain the necessary faith we must hear — made possible as a blessing from God. What we hear is the

Word of God — the Truth hidden from the beginning and at that specific moment revealed to those called. Hearing is made possible because God called, commissioned, and sent some servant to proclaim that Word. Then, finally, the call of God is completed when the hearer ACTS on that revealed Word.

Yes, what a great blessing to HEAR the Word of God. A miracle incomparable, indeed.

Now let us understand how that "hearing" is made possible. The blueprint of this awesome work was laid out from the beginning.

XII. God Chose To Use Preaching As The Vehicle

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said, "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:21).

How clear!

It is the wisdom of God that makes natural man blind to Truth. In his own natural wisdom, learning, and experience, man cannot find God, or understand Truth — spiritual things. In God's own time, He chooses special instruments to hear the revealed Word. Then, by the "foolishness" of preaching — the preaching of those chosen special instruments — God allows those foreordained to hear, to comprehend the message proclaimed.

To put it succinctly, the one called of God will comprehend the spiritual principles of the Bible by means of preaching. This is the wisdom of God. From the beginning, that arrangement has not changed.

The blessing to those who faithfully listen, hear, and respond is eventual salvation. Having accepted the Truth, life becomes an avenue of trial and faith. The Word received is immutable. But, because of our natural weaknesses there will be many temptations to lessen the force, to change or prevent that which was heard. As Paul said, preaching is to "save them which believe." Salvation is the blessing given to those who accept, believe, and refuse to change regardless of the temptation.

Paul, writing to the Hebrews (chapter 5, verses 12-14) makes the order of growth and responsibility clear. When called we are babes in the understanding and application of spiritual things. We can utilize only the milk of the Word. As we grow spiritually, we are made capable of receiving the more advanced concepts — the meat of the Word. Both knowledge and capability are enhanced by daily usage — applying the spiritual principles in the conduct of our daily lives. The purpose for spiritual maturity is to enable each to teach and help others.

Until that time of maturity, it is essential that we be taught. GOD DOES USE HUMAN TEACHERS. Those teachers are ones grown strong in the faith initially delivered. Those who depart from that way, are themselves in need of being taught the first principles.

Whom does God use to do the initial teaching?

Christ came to carry out a major work here on earth. He successfully completed His work. He said, "It is finished." Following His death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven, He organized His work here on earth. Through the Apostle Paul He said, ". . . he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers . . ." (Eph. 4:11). For what purpose? "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ . . ." (verse 12). The body of Christ is the Church (Col. 1:18, 24).

How long was the organization to continue? Paul wrote, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ . . ." (Eph. 4:13). Obviously, this condition of spiritual perfection will not prevail until the return of Christ. Therefore, the need for preaching and being taught continues today. What is the Bible indication of a continuing need for instruction and preaching? Paul continues, "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 . . ." (verse 14). Understanding world conditions today emphasizes how greatly the need of preaching continues. Nothing is more apparent today than doctrinal perversion and deception.

Finally, what is the Bible indication, if any, of perfected spiritual growth and the evidence preaching is NOT needed? Paul says, ". . . speaking the truth in love . . . grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ . . ." (verse 15). FAITHFUL ADHERENCE TO THE TRUTH — the doctrine revealed — and orderly growth FROM INFANCY TO MATURITY is the evidence. Confusion, perversion, and proliferation of individual conceptions is the manifestation of a need for the continuation of sound doctrinal preaching.

A cursory observation of conditions within the Church today will tell you whether a ministry is still needed!

Preaching is still VERY ESSENTIAL. The "foolishness" of preaching is the choice God has made.

Why did God choose to use preaching as the vehicle by which to call and feed His own chosen people? When did He choose that system? How long does God intend to use it?

A. Why Did God Choose Preaching?

There was a time when God spoke to the people directly. It was a frightening experience. As a result, the people themselves sought an indirect way of receiving instruction from God (Ex. 19:18-21). God heard that request and honored it. On that very request, the office of Christ's ministry, as a human instrument, was established. Let us carefully note the words given to Moses. "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; According to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them ALL that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die" (Deut. 18: 15-20).

The people chose an INDIRECT WAY of receiving the Truth — the Words of God. God honored their request. From the days of Moses until the time of Christ, He chose human vessels to whom He gave His Words of instruction. Those servants were warned to be faithful. No license was given them. Only the Words God gave were to be preached.

All Biblical history shows God used this system of organization up to the time of Christ. Some chosen vessels remained faithful to God. Others arrogated responsibilities to themselves. But, Christ, the very object of the original prophecy, was faithful (Heb. 3:1-6) even as Moses had been.

God gave His words to Christ. Christ faithfully taught them. He was God's instrument by whom the Truth was taught. Those called heard it.

Did this system of proclaiming the Truth come to a conclusion with the ministry of Christ? Is the acquisition of Truth a one-on-one relationship with Christ? Do we as individuals go directly to Christ to learn the Truth? Or, is a ministry still required in our day?

Jesus answers those specific questions. He said to His Apostles, "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]: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with YOU [whom?] alway, EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE WORLD . . ." (Matt. 28:19-20).

To whom did Jesus direct these comments? Indeed, the twelve Apostles initially. But, the twelve Apostles are not living today. Since His commission was to be done "unto the end of the world" the "you" to whom Christ directed His comments is the New Testament ministry initially represented by the twelve Apostles.

What are those representatives to teach? The very Words which Jesus Christ had commanded. And what had Christ commanded? Only the Words which God, the Father, had given to Him. He said He had not spoken one word which the Father had not given to Him.

So, how long was this ministry to continue? Jesus said, ". . . I am with you [the ministry] alway, even unto the end of the world."

When is the end of the world — the consummation of the age? In Matthew 24, Jesus indicated the time known as the consummation of the age. It is synonymous with His second coming (Matt. 24:3)!

The foolishness of preaching, the method of making the Truth of God known, continued from the days of Moses until Christ and then from the days of Christ until His second coming. The preaching of God's Word is as mandatory today as it was in the days of the prophets. As we noted earlier (Eph. 4: 11-15), the need is more urgent today than at any time previously.

Preaching, yes! But not just any message. It must be the one and only unchanged message which God revealed in the day of Christ (Rom. 16:25-26). The same message delivered to Israel (Heb. 4:1-2) though they could not obey it (Deut. 5: 29). To preach any other message results in condemnation by God. Anyone who accepts, practices, and believes any other message is destined to experience failure and heart-rending disappointment.

Let us now become cognizant of specific instruments chosen to preach from the time of Christ to the present.

1. CHRIST

Christ was a teacher from God. Though He was given the Words of God, the people did not generally understand. Only those called and given enlightenment could understand. See the instructions Jesus gave in Matthew 15: 1-20. Some were permitted to understand, others were not. Among those called to understand were Christ's trainees — the twelve Disciples.

Those called to understand, heard the message of Christ. They did not acquire any understanding on their own. Christ taught. The people heard. Among those called to understand were the future servants of God, those called to eventually preach the same Truth.

2. THE TWELVE APOSTLES

The commission: Preach the message to all peoples and nations until the end — the consummation of the age. Christ had preached the Word in His day. He was now ascended into the heavens — having completed the work which God gave Him to perform. Next in that line of authoritative responsibility were the twelve Apostles — now commissioned and sent by Christ. The people heard through their preaching.

What did they preach?

John, the Apostle wrote, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare [preach] we unto you, that ye [the people called to hear] also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you . . ." (I John 1:1-5).

Christ had been authorized to preach the Truth. The people called to understand what He taught heard and

responded. From the number who heard and responded God chose some who were to teach the same message. Other people heard and responded to those servants. It was exactly as God had ordained. The people heard and responded to the preaching. Note a historical example in Acts 8:29-35.

The effectiveness of preaching continued. In process of time God called Paul. He became the Apostle to the Gentiles. Through him many people heard the Truth.

3. THE APOSTLE PAUL

Paul also knew and understood God's order of events. In his day the responsibility of preaching continued. He wrote to Titus, ". . . acknowledging of the truth [by the people] which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour . . ." (Titus 1:1-3).

To the Colossians he wrote, "Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you [the people called in Colosse], to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach . . . and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus . . ." (Col. 1:25-28).

To the Galatians Paul wrote, ". . . it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen . . ." (Gal. 1:15-16).

Further, he said, relevant to the twelve Apostles, ". . . I went up [to Jerusalem] by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles . . ." (Gal. 2:2).

To the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication . . . for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of

the gospel . . . that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6:18-20).

The Gentiles called of God heard the message and responded through the preaching of the Apostle Paul. In every example of the chosen people of God, hearing the Truth of God, God used the same organizational structure. The Truth was given to called and chosen instruments. These servants were sent to proclaim that way of life. The people whom God willed to come to a knowledge of the Truth heard the message and responded.

The historical events of Israel as well as the time of Christ and the Apostles are recorded as the inspired Word of God. They are written for us. God does not change His ways, even in our time. As He called and sent in those days, so does He in our day.

The Bible prophetically tells us how God would deal with His people in the last days. His way has never changed.

4. THE LAST-DAY PROPHETS

In times of old, God always instructed and warned the people of trouble or impending disaster. He said through His servant, Amos, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

God did not go to the people directly. He sent His servants, the prophets, with the appropriate messages. Those historical events are recorded for us today. God is unchanging. Today, He chooses His servants and sends them to warn the people — giving them the required message. It is then up to the people to hear and respond.

The people come to the knowledge of the Truth through the preaching of God's chosen vessels. Once they have heard, the obligation of response and continuity of faith is totally incumbent upon them.

XIII. What Continuing Obligation Rests Upon The Called People?

Through preaching the people come to a knowledge of the Truth. Once they have heard, what spiritual obligation falls squarely upon their shoulders?

They must faithfully adhere to that which is revealed — that which they heard and accepted.

God's way is singular. The doctrine is one. Though many individuals are called, all responding will be in harmony by means of the Holy Spirit. If controversy — doctrinal difference — surfaces, this difference must be sublimated and harmony or agreement underscored. In due time God will make plain all points of difference. It must be remembered how and to whom God makes His will known.

To the Philippians, Paul makes this need very clear (Ph'p. 3:15-16). God's will had been given to the Apostle Paul. He, then, instructed the Philippians to be aggressive in that which they had heard and received. However, if they were contrary minded, the difference must be suppressed for the sake of harmony. Then, in due time, God would make the matter plain to them. But, for the present, they must purposefully and wholeheartedly walk in the perfection which they had already attained. Harmony, agreement, is absolutely imperative. Division is NOT of God. The mind and Spirit of God are one. There is no disagreement. Disharmony comes from personal, human, individualism. Christianity means walking in the oneness of the mind of God. Disharmony — differences — must be resolved by an open and candid evaluation of concepts held contrary to the revealed way of God.

To the Ephesians Paul made the order of hearing and the response plain. He wrote, "In whom [Christ] ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise . . ." (Eph. 1:13).

First, we hear the Truth through preaching (Rom. 10:14). Next, we accept what we have heard and believe it. The depth of belief is a matter of character and conviction. It is entirely dependent upon personal will, determination, and resolve. If we have fulfilled our obligation well, we will be strong and beyond the reach of adverse persuasion or influence. Then, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise — the power that enables us to live the Truth successfully and consistently.

As the years pass, we must remember our initial trust — the joyous and wholehearted response to what we heard and accepted. If we fail to remember that beginning, the effects of trial, doubt, adversity, and difficulty will efface the initial trust and belief. The pathway of spiritual history is strewn with the casualties of those who lost that faith and trust.

To the Thessalonians Paul made these principles understandable (I Thess. 1:4-6). They knew they were elected of God, called to understand the gospel which Paul taught and then to act upon that Word and

walk in the same footsteps with the Apostle himself. The requirement was (and is) faithfulness to the Truth revealed. Future growth is not possible unless we retain the first principles which we were taught (Heb. 6:1). Growth is not a restructuring of belief from time to time. It is the enhancement of knowledge — the adding of new revelation to the first principles received (II Pet. 3:15-18). Steadfastness and growth are not in conflict. The true Christian is steadfast in the first knowledge given — by divine revelation — any change of doctrine cannot be considered growth.

What are the continuing obligations? Remember our call and conversion — our trust in Christ and the Truth. Keep faith and confidence strong. Add new knowledge to our steadfast beliefs as God reveals it. And finally, be unmoveable in our convictions until the end.

XIV. What Will The Response Of The Faithful Be?

They will remember those ministers and brethren who are faithful with the Word of God (Heb. 13:7-9). They will walk in their steps of faith, always considering the end result of their conduct. All called servants of God must be aware of hypocrisy and double standards. They will consistently be aware of the unchangeable nature of Jesus Christ — the One who is the Word and the way of life. They will not accept change contrary to the original revelation. Strange and diverse doctrines are totally contrary to the unalterable way of God.

When the called servants heard the Truth initially they accepted it as the Word of God (I Thess. 2:12-13). Their faith in that conviction will remain strong despite manifold trials and tests. That conviction formed the basis of their baptism. The covenant agreement between them and God — an agreement to destroy the self and live the revealed way given to them.

They will not make the mistake of judging the Truth by the weaknesses of the ministry (Gal. 4:14). They realize ministers are human beings, too. All called servants of God need mercy, kindness, and understanding. No man should be rejected because of weaknesses. We must avoid others only when the will to overcome and to effect personal mastery is lost.

XV. Why Do So Many Fail To Realize The Full Blessings Of God?

Too many people delude themselves. There is a surface pretext to acknowledge the Truth but the heart is not right (Matt. 15:7-9). These worship God in vain. Their doctrines are the concepts of men.

How can we realize God's great blessings and love unless we become honest and faithful?

The Truth is taught by God's called ministry. We hear and respond to it. Future stature with God is dependent upon continuous suppression of self and faithful adherence to the way of life received — through the preaching of those God called and sent. To falter in that faith and turn back to the self ends in disaster (Heb. 6:4-6).

Let us realize the full love and blessings of God. Let us remember the words heard, the trust generated, and the joyous response to that revealed way of life.

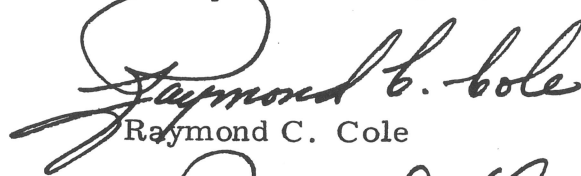
Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him [God, The Father] that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). And Jesus said of those who would follow Him, "He that heareth you [the ministry] heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him [God, The Father] that sent me" (Luke 10:16).

God has always utilized chosen servants to proclaim His way of life. To reject those whom He sends is the same as rejecting God Himself.

The next installment in this series of letters covering the subject of the "Two Facets of Knowledge" will follow two months from now, as God wills.

Again, we convey all our fond affection and thoughts of kindness to all. Our prayers are always with and for you.

With profound respect,


Raymond C. Cole


Bryce G. Clark