

# Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

Within the past few weeks we have partaken of the bread and wine symbolizing the body and the blood of Jesus Christ. Following that ordinance we have eaten unleavened bread for a period of seven days -- which God calls the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Preparatory to receiving the emblems which represent the body and blood of Jesus Christ, we, by command of God, were required to make diligent introspection -- examination -- of our personal lives. Evaluation was essential in order to avoid the serious possibility of partaking of the life of Christ unworthily.

As serious as failing to be worthy to partake of the emblems representing the body and blood of Christ on Passover night is, it is equally reprehensible to falter in the implied duty to effect daily evaluations with corresponding changes in the days which follow Passover. The responsibility involved in "Passover examination" is not an exercise in futility. That examination is indicative of need confronting us day by day in producing the necessary change in our lives.

Inherent in the acceptance of Passover is an implied desire to bring about required change -- personal mastery over defects uncovered by the exercise of the examination process. Further, the annual rehearsal of Passover with the subsequent Feast of Unleavened Bread indicates a number of things: (1) continuing defect in the lives of those bearing the responsibility of examination, (2) with previous spiritual growth, a more comprehensive and deeper evaluation is possible, (3) with previous mastery of self and corresponding development of the spiritual mind a more honest evaluation of the self is possible, (4) with a more careful evaluation of the self comes the manifestation of greater determination to effect required changes, and (5) the need to actually live the Truth (Christ is the Truth) in all our daily activities -- to become the image of Christ in our flesh.

We are not left without opportunities and ways by which to evaluate our progress. In God's great wisdom He designed a way by which character could be developed. Being a process, the attainment of character contains both a beginning and an ending. As a merciful God,

He establishes us upon that course at the beginning. From that beginning we are required to grow until we reach the full maturation of Jesus Christ who is the Author and Finisher of our faith. Let us notice the beginning, development, and completion of that growth process.

In human life, we begin as mere babes. Initially, all our needs must be anticipated by someone other than ourselves. From that humble beginning, we must grow and develop. A part of that development process is the assumption of greater and greater responsibility. Ultimately, we are fully chargeable for all actions which we take. It is assumed that we have grown physically, mentally, and emotionally so that we can assume the charge which has come to bear upon us. The individual who has successfully undergone this training process is equipped to confront the issues and demands of life.

In exactly the same way, the spiritual life must begin, progress, and culminate. We begin our walks as children of God as mere babes (I Pet. 2:1-2). That point of beginning is lively and anticipatory for a babe (I Pet. 1:3). But, it is tragic for one who should have grown and matured on a progressive basis to revert to childlike mannerisms (Heb. 5:12-14). In other words, God expects us to act our age -- to manifest maturing characteristics. Thus, the continuing requirement of "Passover examination."

Once we have come into the spiritual world, being called of God, the school of life has really begun. We are accountable for opportunities given and the education received. We are being evaluated and will be judged on the basis of what we have done with those opportunities. It is absolutely tragic for us to squander our spiritual youth with rationalizations, justifications, outright arguments, and assumptions. This is the time for appropriate continuing education. As our Teacher, God has not failed to administer His part of the training and teaching. He is a masterful and wise Parent. He is our Father -- a Father who wants to see us develop and mature for the purpose of assuming greater responsibility. How beautifully this principle is laid out by the Apostle Paul in Hebrews 12:1-13! But of what value is the loving chastisement of a concerned Father if we refuse to accept the necessity of that correction (Isa. 1:1-6)? Israel was the firstborn son of God physically, as we are the firstborn spiritually (Heb. 12:23).

If we are in tune with God, if our minds are truly spiritually oriented, we will be accepting the educational responsibility of our own lives. The Holy Spirit will be leading us into all Truth (John 16:13). We will be responsive, teachable. We will accept the situations and circumstances of life. These will be revealing to us areas of life which need change or improvement. Who can take exception

with the operation of the Holy Spirit? It is the arm of power by which God intervenes in our lives to determine need (Jer. 17:9-10).

The success of our begettal and spiritual development can be determined by capability and productivity. Any maturing child is more capable and can produce more than a mere babe. Growth is all-important to God.

How can we monitor our own spiritual growth? Is it possible to know whether or not our own carnal minds are dominating us rather than the mind of Jesus Christ? How can we possibly effectively carry out the duty of "Passover examination" unless we can tell the difference?

Growth is manifested in improved spirituality and a corresponding reduction in carnality. This is all fine and good. But, what is true spirituality? What is the manifestation of problem-causing carnality? The Bible gives very clear definitions of both.

What is carnality?

The Greek word for carnal is sarkikos which comes from the word sarx (flesh). Carnality, therefore, is the manifestation of human (flesh) nature. Those manifestations are the works of flesh. These works are found in Galatians 5:19-21, Colossians 2:2, 8; 3:8-9.

The fleshly works mentioned in the above texts are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, unbelief, man-made philosophies, vain deceit, malice, blasphemy, filthy conversation, and lying. These are the thoughts and actions of which we repented, preparing ourselves to partake of the Passover bread which represents the body of Christ. These are the very manifestations and tendencies which we must guard against throughout the coming year. Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread will be of little meaning and value to us unless we fulfill the intent and purpose in our daily lives.

Inherent in the above works are questions which must be confronted daily. Some of the questions involved are the following. Do I have control over my mind and emotions regarding all my relationships with other human beings -- both the converted and the unconverted? Am I pulled by carnal lusts? Have I learned to keep my mind under control? Am I neat, orderly, and clean in the discharge of every responsibility borne in this life? Do I manifest any resistance against any of the laws, statutes, and judgments of God? Do I tend to idolize anything of this world -- the physical? Am I mesmerized by the unorthodox and mysterious? Am I flirting with powers and the unusual? Do I negatively respond to situations and conditions of this life? Do my

actions, words, and behavior stir up strife, hatred, wrath, and indifference? Am I filled with the Spirit of God, or am I supported mentally by imbibing too many alcoholic beverages? Do I have confidence in the revealed Word of God? Or, am I incessantly challenging those Truths fundamental to call and conversion? Am I involved in any form of heresy or sedition (dissent)? (Obviously, all heresy and sedition must be determined by some established basis. That basis can only be the revealed Word of God.)

Do we have full confidence in the knowledge we were initially given? Do we love that Way with our whole mind and being? Or, are we mesmerized by human intellect and skill, the vanity of the natural mind? Do we have absolute confidence in the simplicity of God's Truth? Or, do we look to the greatness and skills of men?

Are we inclined to ridicule and second-guess others? Do we always assume the best concerning what is said or written? Do we manifest any form of malice or contempt for others? Do we always honor God with mind, heart, and mouth? Do we always have a ready list of justifications for actions, comments, and behavior?

The above questions are what the examination process is all about. This personal interrogation should have preceded the partaking of Passover. Now that Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread have come and gone, it is incumbent upon us to fulfill all the inherent expectations resulting from our partaking of Passover. We are now faced with the necessity of living the Way of Life which we indicated we were willing to pursue by partaking of Passover and eating unleavened bread for a period of seven days.

How can we tell what kind of progress we are making in effecting the required transition from carnality to spirituality? That evaluation is just as imperative as the other, for no man can be a vacuum. He will either live the way of the flesh or he will manifest the traits of the Spirit.

What is true and genuine spirituality?

The products (manifestations) of the Spirit are as follows: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, mercy, kindness, humility, a forgiving and noncorrosive spirit, and contentment.

Does love rule our lives? Do we always esteem others better than self? Do we always refuse to believe the worst of anyone? Do negative comments received die with our receipt of them? Or, do we convey hurtful and injurious information -- right or wrong?



Are we inclined toward joyousness, peace, and a feeling of well-being? Do we exude the majesty of the life of Christ being lived in us? Just what kind of an image do we leave before others? Are we a joy to be around? Do we always make others feel comfortable -- never repressed with the negatives of our own personal lives? Do we always see the very best in others?

Are we gentle, kind, and considerate? Do we manifest a concern for the well-being of others? Do we manifest only a positive interest in the affairs of others -- always wanting to know how to benefit and help others? Is there a great deal of personal magnetism and warmth in our relationships with others -- first of the household of faith, then toward any and all in the world?

Do we manifest balance and control in our lives? Do we always remember that how we live does affect other people -- for no man is an island of himself? Do we always remember that the minds and hearts of those of the household of faith are inextricably bound up with us in our own lives -- that what happens to us does emotionally affect them? Are we temperate -- manifesting controlled dignity?

Do we manifest stability and confidence in the Way of Life to which we were called? Are we humble and contrite in our demeanor? Are we always merciful, benevolent, and understanding?

Do we always manifest the nature and character of God and His Son Jesus Christ? Are we truly a light to others -- an example of God's Way of Life?

When you partook of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread you inherently agreed, before God, to evaluate yourselves in all the areas of life mentioned above. That process of evaluation must be carried on throughout the year. The fruits of that evaluation must be lives lived according to the spiritual intent of the Father. God will accept nothing less than our total submission to Him, allowing Him to create within us the full perfection which He possesses.

Before us lies opportunity! We must seize that opportunity before the task becomes more difficult or perhaps impossible. Do not lose the image of the self which emerged by careful introspection just a few days ago.

Let us never falsely assume a specific mental image of our relationship which we believe we experience with God, the Father. There is a way by which we can know what that relationship is. God has not left us without the necessary guidelines by which to evaluate ourselves. How can we know?

Our relationship with our fellow man indicates just where we stand in our relationship with God. The Apostle John wrote, ". . . we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (I John 4:16-20.)

If we would honestly like to know what our relationship with God is, all we need to do is examine ourselves with respect to our relationships with our brothers and sisters of the common faith. This may not be a pretty assessment but most certainly it will be a revealing one. If we tend to regard only those who increase the personal image of ourselves, are we not partial? Did not God call all those who come to Him in faith and conviction, regardless of station or position in life? Let us evaluate ourselves fairly and honestly. It is better to do it now while there is yet time to make the necessary changes in our lives. For if we do not correctly examine the self now, there is coming a day when that certain judgment will be rendered by God and Christ.

John simply stated that if we have a hope of everlasting life lodged in our consciousness, we will purify ourselves now (I John 3:3). Passover will not be an exercise in futility. The partaking of the Days of Unleavened Bread will evidence meaning and purpose in our daily lives. Changes will be very much in evidence. The old self will be dying; the spiritual life will be maturing. Truly we will be pressing forward in glorious anticipation of the ultimate goal -- to be like Him in character as well as substance (Ph'p. 3:13-15, II Tim. 4:7). Our "Passover examination" will not have been in vain. We will aggressively act on the defects indicated by viewing ourselves in relationship to the Laws of God (Jas. 1:22-25).

Let us not be disappointed in that day of final judgment. By making the right moves now we can confidently stand before Christ and the judgment seat at His Second Coming.

Have we really loved the Truth? Do we really have confidence in that Way to which we were called? Do we really love God and His glorious purpose? Have we really come to see ourselves for what we are in the eyes of God? Do we really want to be possessors of the divine nature and character of God? If we can confidently assert the positive in all the questions above, the evidence will be manifested in our lives as we live them day by day.

What are the ultimate proofs that the meaning of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread are comprehended and have taken deep root in our thinking and purpose? Of the many listed Biblically, the five following ones are very significant.

1. An unrelenting pursuit of the spiritual goal for which we were called by God -- enduring all trials and tests (Matt. 24:13).

2. Continuing without hesitation in the Way of Life to which we were called (John 8:31).

3. Unwavering in spirit and direction -- manifesting no weakness of faith or conviction (II Pet. 3:16-18, I Cor. 15:58, Heb. 3:13-14, I Pet. 5:8-10). Though the last text applies specifically to the ministry it does relate to all in a general manner.

4. A non-questioning demeanor (I Tim. 6:3-6; 1:3-8). Because of man's natural mental ability, this is undoubtedly the most difficult posture to assume. We tend to want to trust only that which we ascertain ourselves. But, we must remember that Truth does not come via those channels.

5. A confident and assured posture (Ph'p. 1:6, I Thess. 2:12-13). Those called and chosen of God know who they are. They recognize the Truth and are unmovable.

In conclusion, let us encourage you to read and ponder deeply I John 2:3-11. If we will carefully evaluate our relationships with others of the common faith, we can readily ascertain our relationship with God, the Father. If God could overlook all our defects when sending His Son Jesus Christ to die for us, surely we can overlook the problems of each other. Remember, we do not condone wrong by manifesting a heart of sympathy and understanding. Too many times, it seems that the common conception is that if we overlook wrong we are tacitly approving it. Nothing could be farther from the Truth. God certainly did not condone sin when He sent His Son to die for us.

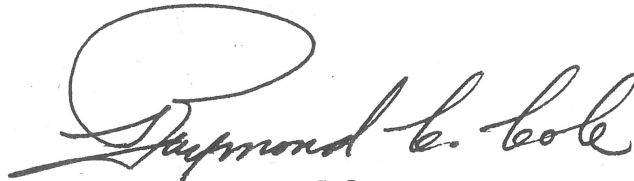
Let us make Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread meaningful for the entire year -- all the way to Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread next year. Now is the time for us to really begin living the whole Truth -- living it in glorious anticipation of the ultimate goal, to be born into a perfect family. God has called us. He has done His part. We are given a chance to make something out of our lives. If we will put forth the requisite effort, God will even back us up in that endeavor. Can we expect more?

Deepest love and affection to all. Indeed, our hearts and minds go out to you all daily. We are aware of the trials and difficulties

which you must face. But if we will pray for one another, who can destroy us?

Now, let us look forward to Pentecost. With the meaning well inscribed in hearts and minds, the significance of Pentecost should be awesome. How good God is to us. Let us praise Him daily for that goodness and love.

With a heart full of love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Raymond C. Cole

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bryce G. Clark". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Bryce G. Clark