

Church of God, The Eternal

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March 1985

Warmest Greetings, again, Brethren:

We are facing the approach of the third month of the calendar year 1985. It is doubtful if many, however, will regret the passing of the past couple of months. Weather records have been broken in significant numbers across the United States as well as in many parts of the outside world. At some given time these and other catastrophic events are and will be the harbingers of more devastating things to come. In all probability, when these prelude events occur, they will be accepted, for the most part, in the same diffident manner in which such events are accepted today. As a human race, we have become so calloused and indifferent to times and circumstances that tragic events are little more than passing circumstances in our daily lives. We are shocked momentarily and then on the basis of past mental conditioning are capable of restructuring our lives on the same pattern of the past, giving little thought to the adversities just experienced. Is it any wonder that God, in various ways, says, "Do you never stop and ask why such circumstances prevail in your lives?" If, truly, there is a God, all things happen for reason, purpose. Is not this the entire lesson taught by the historic panorama given in the book of Daniel? Life's experiences must not be lived in vain. They are the manifest record of God's benevolent intervention or His categoric rejection.

Are we capable of reading the events and circumstances of our individual lives? Such ability is a most profound evidence, manifestation, of our own level of true conversion. On the other hand, vicious attempts to denigrate others caught in negative circumstances -- by presumed judgment -- are a profound manifestation of individual carnality. If God so loved the world -- though completely undeserving -- that He could give His only begotten Son as "an offer" of help, can we manifest any less concern, love, and compassion for those who do not quite "live up to our expectations of right and wrong"? How can we be the possessors of the divine nature and manifest anything less than the same character He manifested through the life of Jesus Christ when He walked upon this earth? Tears of grief stained His cheeks when confronted with the unbelief of mankind. The needs of others constantly moved Him with manifested compassion. Yet, these people were simply experiencing the events which, by the lives they were living, they were required to undergo. Would it not be awful to find, at some future date, we had behaved badly toward some ultimate son or daughter of God -- a member of our own spiritual family?

The people of this world are being tyrannically brutalized by the forces now at play. They are not aware of what is happening. Yet, they must pay the ultimate price for this perversion and deception -- the terrible, heartrending events of the last days, besides the routine, daily events which beset them. How deeply we must be affected by the certainty of these events if we even momentarily reflect upon them. Does the unwitting arrogance, deception, the indifferent confidence of the masses make their approach to the gallows any less painful to those who do understand?

In the context of the above thoughts, it is necessary to add one other dimension to the subjects covered in the September 1984 Monthly Letter -- "What Must Not Be Tolerated" -- and the January 1985 Letter -- "What Must Be Tolerated." We need to consider the function of the ministry -- "Who Is Responsible for the Ministry?" and, "What Is the Purpose of the Ministry?" -- especially as it relates to these times in which we live.

After reviewing the two Monthly Letter issues mentioned above it is quite obvious that several questions were left unanswered. In order to make sure the subject is covered as completely as possible, we want to address those questions at this time. After the completion of this series of Letters, I plan to write on a number of other subjects.

ALL ABOUT THE MINISTRY

Right or wrong, the ministry has been an active profession for thousands of years. It is not highly esteemed by the "man in the street" or, for that matter, by the average churchgoer. Yet there is no profession which warrants greater respect and consideration. Why does this paradox exist? Once the subject is explained, the answers to that question will become most obvious.

The Ministry Is Ordained of God

Very infrequently throughout the history of man has God personally and actively intervened in the affairs of man. Just how few have been addressed personally by God can be determined by a count. The number is very small. Yet, God has had a hand in the affairs of men at all ages. How?

In the times of the patriarchs -- from Adam to the time of Moses -- God dealt directly through those patriarchs. Messages were given to them -- messages which affected other peoples as well as themselves. Via this means God made His will known to those with whom

He was working at that time. Individuals were involved. Through them God instructed those who were the object of His concern.

After the passage of over 2,000 years, God determined to establish a nation -- a nation which He had prognosticated before the foundation of the world (Deut. 32:8). Though He used an individual (Moses), as he had done earlier in the history of man, to receive and convey information to that nation, He selected, trained, and commissioned an order of men to carry out the duties of teaching, guiding, and instructing His own chosen people, Israel. God selected Aaron and his sons to become the high priests of Israel's national religious service. The significance of the office and responsibility can best be understood by observing the nature of and the exclusive use of the anointing oil which God required to be used for the separation of this priesthood (Ex. 30:30-33). Under penalty of death, that holy anointing oil was to be used in no other way. Further, it was not to be duplicated for any reason.

The very context of the above verses seems to imply that the people of Israel were prohibited from seizing any presumed "privilege or right" to select and ordain whom they chose from their own ranks. God had selected and approved the ordination of Aaron and his sons. This separation was achieved by the using of this special consecrating oil. Since it was not to be duplicated or used upon the flesh of anyone else in the ranks of the children of Israel, the natural conclusion is that God alone could call and commission those to fulfill the office of this priesthood. To act in a presumptive manner would mean certain death. The office as ordained by God was to be honored and respected. That position could be filled by the appointment of God only. This is a point to consider well.

Consider the scope of special physical preparations necessary for the consecration of Aaron and his sons -- the priesthood. An elaborate bathing process -- cleansing -- at the door of the Tabernacle. The specially tailored holy garments were to be put on. Then the anointing and sanctification process was undertaken. Once this ritual was completed, the responsibility was obligatory throughout life (Ex. 40:13-15). Under the terms of the Old Covenant, once a minister was selected by God he could not reject that profession. The anointing and consecration were for life.

Remembering that there were millions of members in the House of Israel, it becomes obvious that Aaron and the members of his specific house could not possibly handle all the religious rites incumbent upon them. How was this need solved? The tribe of Levi was chosen to minister before the Lord.

Though initially faithful to God, some of the children of Levi allowed their own carnal natures to get out of hand on occasion (Num. 16:9). They were not satisfied with the position and responsibility ordained of God. They were desirous of taking the office which God had given to Aaron and his sons. Indeed, if these object lessons are written for us upon whom the ends of the world are come, it is quite obvious that no person should assume to assert "rights" or "opportunities" which have not been delivered to him by God Himself. It is imperative that the man chosen of God must not reject that responsibility. But, it is equally imperative that the man ordained of God must not presume or arrogate to himself office which has not been delivered to him. God will not hold either individual guiltless. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Why are men so incapable of leaving God's responsibilities entirely up to Him?

Noted earlier was the special care God required in making physical preparations for the priests to enter into the service to which they had been called. Among those preparations was the necessity of wearing special clothing -- holy garments. Those garments were indicative of the character which God requires of his servants. Please compare the following texts: Exodus 39:41, Matthew 7:15, I Peter 5:5, and II Corinthians 5:2-4.

Aaron, his sons, and the whole tribe of Levi bore the absolute responsibility of the Tabernacle of assembly and all the religious service required by God. No stranger, outsider, or man of other tribes within the nation of Israel was to assume any right in that service. To do so was a death penalty (Num. 18:1-7). That ministry belonged to God. He called and appointed them. They were specially consecrated and set apart for that responsibility. As the ministry chosen by God, they were required to teach and instruct on the basis of what God delivered to them -- not that which they thought out for themselves. They were the chosen servants of God to convey His messages to His people, the House of Israel (Deut. 17:8-13; 21:5).

How does the ministry of the Old Testament affect or influence the ministry of the New Testament? What is the New Testament ministry? Is it but the continuation of the Old with certain modifications?

Without going into elaborate detail, within the scope of this Letter, let us understand how the Old was a foreshadowing of the New. The High Priest and the office he held pictured an office of responsibility to be borne by Christ. Since Aaron was a physical human being, subject to death, his sons were consecrated to follow him -- the means whereby the office of the priest would be perpetuated. Christ's office would be an eternal one for He would not be subject to death.

In like manner, the total priesthood under Aaron pictured a future ministry which would exist under the auspices of Jesus Christ. That ministry is the New Testament ministry -- the ministry of Jesus Christ still being carried out here on the earth. Please read and study Hebrews 8:1-6.

Even though Jesus Christ was received up into the heavens shortly after His resurrection, he established a ministry which continues to this day. Subsequent to Christ's departure, those called and ordained to the office of minister have become the ministers of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:7).

The High Priest of the Old Testament ministry was Aaron. The High Priest of the New Testament ministry is Jesus Christ. Since He is empowered with an endless life, there is no need of sons to perpetuate the office. These New Testament ministers are under the authority of Christ and have become the stewards of the mysteries of God (I Cor. 4:1). The Greek word for "ministers" is hupeeretees, which simply means officers. In Acts 13:5 John is called a hupeeretees, that is, minister or officer. In Acts 26:16 the Apostle Paul is called a hupeeretees. In Luke 1:2 all the Twelve whom Christ called to become apostles were called hupeeretees. Note now the meaning of the word, hupeeretees, as used in Matthew 5:25. Here the word is translated "officer." The context of the word makes it quite clear that the party so addressed was one commissioned and who bore specific authority. Ministers, therefore, are individuals who are commissioned and sent by someone in authority. As commissioned officers they bear some of the authority vested in the One who commissions them.

Though they bear authority, delivered by the One who sent them, they at the same time are servants. We read, ". . . whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister [diakonos]; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:26-27). The definition of a servant is clearly illustrated in John 2:9 and Matthew 22:13.

Servants of God bear authority. That authority is limited by the message and commission given. In its own right it reflects the natural subservience owed to the One who commissions and sends. Therefore, the true ministers of Jesus Christ are limited by the Word, the message, and the scope of the commission given. A servant has no right to alter, change, or modify the responsibility given. He is but the messenger sent to carry out the orders of the One who commissions.

The New Testament ministry is under the authority of Jesus Christ. The ministry belongs to Christ. It is His ministry. Whoever the called ministers of today are, they are but the servants of Christ.

There is ample Biblical evidence to show that the ministry of Jesus Christ continues today. Is there any way by which we can show the transition of that ministry?

The Ministry: From Christ to Those Who Follow Him

While carrying out His commission, Christ had consistently emphasized the fact He was beginning a ministry which would continue into the future. Finally, at the time of the conclusion of His work, He plainly spoke to the twelve disciples which He had chosen, apprising them of the work and the message which they were to fulfill (John 17:18). He repeated this fact in John 20:21.

Since Christ was given a message and a territory, the expression "as" in the above texts certainly implies that the disciples were being sent out with the same message, authority and limits. Remember, it was Christ who said, ". . . I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). Does not history show that exactly the same commission was given to the twelve apostles? Not until much later did God call and commission the Apostle Paul to go to the Gentiles.

The ministry of Jesus Christ was transferred to the twelve apostles. It is the ministry of Jesus Christ which was foreshadowed by the priesthood and the ministry of the Old Testament. Though the nature of the ministry has changed, the content -- message -- has never been altered. It is the same. It has always been the same. It will never change.

By the Spirit of the living God those chosen and commissioned to preach the message have been made able ministers of the New Covenant (compare II Cor. 3:3, 6). The transition from the Old to the New occurred at the time of Christ. He taught the expanded spiritual principles of the New Covenant. The ministry of the Old was under the auspices of Aaron and his sons. The ministry of the New is under the direction and authority of Jesus Christ.

For three-and-one-half years Christ established the New Covenant ministry. As we have seen, He arranged for the transition of that ministry to the Twelve following His ascension to heaven. Due to the failure of one of the twelve disciples, later apostles, a special selection had to be made to fill up that vacancy in the ministry ordained to carry on the work which Jesus had commenced (Acts 1:17, 25). The ministry of Jesus Christ was a very special ministry. It was not destined to come to a conclusion with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. That same ministry was to exist until the Second Coming of Christ, as we shall shortly see.

Chronologically, the Apostle Paul followed the commission of the twelve apostles who were sent to the children of Israel. He was commissioned to go to the Gentiles (Acts 13:2-3, 46; Rom. 15:16). As we shall see the message remained the same.

It was this same Jesus who called and put Paul into the ministry (I Tim. 1:12). To this ministry, both to Israel and Gentile, was the meaning of the Truth revealed. It was contained in the Gospel which Christ and all his subsequent ministers taught (Eph. 3:4-9). The Apostle Paul was made a minister of the true ministry created by Jesus Christ. He was called to preach the Gospel. It was the same Gospel which Jesus Christ taught. It was the same Gospel which had been preached at different times and to different peoples (Col. 1:23).

But, what happened to the ministry after the close of the Biblical record contained in the pages of the New Testament? Is there any evidence that the ministry was to continue?

When writing to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul wrote of the purpose and duration of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-14). God established the offices of responsibility within the Church, the Body of Christ. He ordained and established their purpose -- the perfecting of the chosen, the work of the ministry. They are obligated to teach and aid the growth of those whom God has chosen to receive everlasting life. That work must continue until all come to the perfection of Jesus Christ. At what time will such perfection be realized? Surely there is no one who will doubt the fact that such perfection cannot be realized until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the promised birth into the family of God.

It is obvious that the ministry of Jesus Christ was first transferred to the twelve apostles. Next the ministerial office was expanded and given to the Apostle Paul. By inspiration of the Spirit, the Apostle Paul knew that the ministry -- the same as given to Jesus Christ -- was to continue until the work of calling and perfecting human beings is completed. In our period of time, the first finished products will be realized at the Second Coming of Christ.

A ministry which was commenced with the patriarchs, consolidated in the priesthood under Moses and Aaron, given spiritual dimension with efficacy and power under Christ, expanded in geographical purpose under the twelve apostles, again expanded to a universal scope under the direction of the Apostle Paul, and promised to continue until the day of the return of Christ has remained consistently the same. There is but one ministry. In like manner there is but one message. The message which the patriarchs taught, the message which the children of Israel were taught by Moses and the prophets, the message which Jesus Christ received from the Father and brought to the earth, the message

which Christ gave to the twelve apostles, the message which Christ later gave to the Apostle Paul, and the message the Church has been obligated to proclaim throughout the centuries -- especially in the last days -- is one and the same message. Neither the ministry nor the message has changed. Truly God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His ways, laws, and purposes are eternal. Only men in their confusion have designed changes -- changes to suit the times and circumstances under which they live. Men are notorious for their inconsistency. God is known for his unchangeable, eternal nature.

His Ministry Is Required to Carry out Specific Instructions

This principle is illustrated clearly by an example which occurred in the time of Moses. Due to a confrontation, the veracity of call and commission had to be certified. And by that test Moses was inspired to say, ". . . Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind" (Num. 16:28). How important it was for the children of Israel to know who their leader was and to honor him with obedience as long as he remained faithful to the call which God had given him. Note carefully the statement, ". . . know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works." Not only was he called of God and sent, but the very works had been given to him, also. He assumed nothing. He took nothing for granted.

As we have seen, Christ bore the same responsibility (Heb. 8:1-6; 3:5-6). He was given the same message. From the days of Christ the ministry is called the ministry of Christ (Rom. 15:16). As His ministry, Christ chooses and ordains whom He pleases to carry on that responsibility. Man does not of himself choose to become a part of it. He is chosen and placed in that ministry by the will of God. Once he is placed in such a responsibility, he cannot elect to leave it. From the time of his call and commission he must remain the servant of Christ and God. Faithfulness is a prerequisite (Eph. 6:21, I Cor. 4:1-2; 1:7). When one is called of God and Christ to enter the ministry he must give all due consideration to that call (Col. 4:17). God does not give out a ministerial responsibility lightly. It is a very high calling which carries with it both commensurate blessings and punishment, if necessary.

What Are the Specific Responsibilities Given to the Ministry?

First, it is required to preach the Word -- the Gospel.

Those called by God to preach the Word must give first consideration to that responsibility (Acts 6:4). Any change of the message

which God gave -- delivered -- to his chosen messengers is not acceptable. Faithfulness is required of all stewards of that Word. Those called for the purpose of preaching that Way of life will be judged on the basis of that responsibility.

When writing to the Romans, Paul made it clear that He was chosen to preach the Gospel (Rom. 15:16). As he clearly pointed out in other texts, that Gospel message had been delivered to him. He did not presume to alter or change it. To the Corinthians he made this point quite clear. He wrote, "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully [the Word which had been delivered to him]; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (II Cor. 4:1-2).

The Word of God is delivered by God to His chosen ministers. They are required to be absolutely faithful to that charge. Those who hear the preaching of the servants of God must respond in continuous faithfulness, never allowing themselves to be moved from the hope of that Gospel which was faithfully preached by the true ministers (Col. 1:23-27).

The responsibility of the ministry is a gift from God (I Pet. 4:10-11). The preaching of the Gospel is a trust given to those chosen for that charge (I Tim. 1:11-12). Yet, in the last days God warned that some of His servants would not remain faithful to that charge (II Tim. 4:1-5).

The duty imposed upon the chosen ministry is that of preaching the Word. They are not to fear the reactions of those who may disagree. They must preach the message delivered. But, no place is there a charge for them to force others to live that Truth -- to make decisions regarding the lives of others chosen to understand the Truth. Each individual must make the determination to live the Truth based on his own faith.

Second, they must live personally exemplary lives.

Ministers are never allowed to be tyrannical overlords of the people. On the contrary, they are called to be the servants of the people (Matt. 20:25-28). This does not mean that they are subject to the doctrinal dictates of the laity. Indeed not! For to them God entrusted the Word. How then can that Word -- the Way of life -- be subject to the dictate of anyone else? God reveals it and then holds the ministry to whom He entrusted it responsible for preaching and keeping it faithfully. God calls, commissions, and holds responsible those to whom He delivers the message (Acts 26:16).

The manner of life the ministry lives is most revealing. How do their lives manifest the approval of God? The Apostle Paul wrote: "Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost [Spirit], by love unfeigned, By the word of truth [the unchanging Word], by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (II Cor. 6:3-10).

Simply stated, how can a true minister preach the Truth of God -- including the breadth of trials and difficulties -- if he does not live those ways of life? To do any less is to manifest hypocrisy.

Third, they must counsel those in need.

For obvious reasons, a minister should not be a tyro, a neophyte, or young, inexperienced individual. The very term "elder" implies one who is older spiritually. This age of experience is necessary to carry out one of the significant responsibilities of the ministry. He must be able to counsel and give guidance and help where necessary.

Because of trials and difficulties being experienced, several members of the faith were wavering and subjected to doubt. For this reason the Apostle Paul sent Timothy to counsel and strengthen the brethren in the Church located in Thessalonica (I Thess. 3:1-3).

It is the duty of the ministry to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the brethren. In this way it can help and encourage those who have need. Knowledge of weaknesses does not mean that a minister is entitled to use such information to the detriment and hurt of the weak member. He is responsible for encouraging and helping those who possess such needs.

In this way the ministry is able to comfort, bear burdens of the weaker, and to render encouragement where necessary. To fulfill such a responsibility does require rather personal knowledge of other members. But as stated earlier, such knowledge is not to become the basis of actions which injure or hurt those who have need of encouragement and help -- not the damaging results of gossip, surmisings, or vicious slander. A true minister must be able to bear confidentiality -- thereby giving confidence to those who seek necessary counsel and help.

How many people come seeking counsel with their minds already made up regarding the outcome or expectation of a particular situation? Then, hurt and feelings of disagreement, resentment, distrust, and other negative reactions begin to play a dominant role in the thinking and behavior of those who did not obtain their expectations.

If one is going to make up his own mind beforehand, then he should not seek counsel and help. All of us are entitled to make up our own minds. Each is chargeable for his own decisions. If he seeks counselling, he should give it due consideration. For the most part, a true minister is not going to give a definite decision which must be followed. He will attempt to call attention to factors which may have been overlooked. The decisions will always be those of the individual, unless the decisions have already been made by God. In such cases, everyone has the "right" to choose his own way over that of God; but most definitely, he will pay the ultimate price.

One should never come merely seeking the justification or support of a plan, purpose, or way which is contrary to the Truth of God. Many times we have defined that Truth as the "faith once delivered." We are all apprised that such a faith did exist in the last days. A faith from which far too many chosen of God did turn away. As a ministry, we are responsible for upholding that faith which was initially delivered.

Fourth, ministers are to serve the called.

As noted earlier, the first duty of the chosen ministry is to preach the Word of God by which those called of God can come to the Truth. By faithfully preaching that Word they are rendering a great service to the people (I Cor. 3:5; 4:1-2). The Apostle Paul called the ministry the ministry of reconciliation -- a reconciliation accomplished by the Word which was entrusted to them (II Cor. 5:18). In a larger sense it is a total ministering to the needs of the saints (II Cor. 8:4; 9:1).

Ministers are servants of the chosen people of God. Even the authority which God gave to them whereby they can carry out the duties entrusted to them is an authority of service. It is a service which thinks first of the needs of those being served. A true servant is attentive to the emotional, financial, directional, social, and spiritual needs of all who are under his charge. He must give much forethought to the discharge of his office. In a word he is a total servant. The example was set by his superior, Jesus Christ. For Christ came not to be served but to serve.

Fifth, a minister must attend to prayer.

We all must pray for one another. However, in a very special way the ministry is required to pray for the children of God. Christ set the example of dedication to this responsibility. Just before making Himself our personal sacrifice and Savior He uttered a heartrending prayer for those who would be left behind (John 17). When the Church began to grow, certain needs of service became apparent. When confronted with this urgent need, the apostles were required to evaluate the need on the basis of priorities. In a generalized sense, the Twelve addressed this need in the following manner. They said: ". . . It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost [Spirit] and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2-4).

It is the duty of the ministry to remain in close contact with God through prayer. In many ways they are the servants of the people via this channel of prayer.

Sixth, the ministry must warn when necessary.

It is not the duty of the ministry to render personal judgments. However, there are times when the spiritual duty of a minister requires that he warn and admonish. The safekeeping of the flock is a very personal charge.

When writing to the Evangelist Timothy the Apostle Paul put it this way: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [demons]. . . . If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness" (I Tim. 4:1, 6-7).

When writing to the Church at Colosse, Paul warned of the consistent need to keep the people mindful of the necessity to remain faithful to the Truth once delivered (Col. 1:23-26).

It is the duty of the ministry to watch the growth and development of the children of God. God will hold them accountable for the discharge of this responsibility. Yet, the exercise of that duty must not be tainted with the tendency to act in the interest of self. It must be genuine -- based on a genuine love for the chosen sons and daughters of God.

Finally, ministers must carry out duties which will affect others in the future.

An example of this is the work and writings of the prophets. Much that they said and did was not for the people of their time. It was done in a projected interest for those who would come on the scene years later (I Pet. 1:12, read verses 6-13). Only God knows to whom a particular work, writing, or effort is directed. The light and example you and we, as the ministry of Christ today, set may be for others whom we do not know at this time. How much more carefully we would live if we could only realize just how serious our endeavors are in the sight of God.

In a very real sense the majority of the people who have lived upon the face of the earth are waiting for you -- for your perfection and the assumption of responsibility whereby you can and will be able to guide and direct them into the perfect Way of life. Therefore, in an equally real sense, much that may be done in the future could be entirely dependent upon what we as His ministry are doing today.

In conclusion, let us assess responsibility. It is imperative that certain basics be understood.

How can a minister preach the Word until it has been revealed to him? Once revealed he is accountable for its proclamation and faithful continuance in the Way of life. To turn away from the revelation of God will bring sure punishment -- both in the short and long term.

The important thing to remember is that the ministry is accountable for that which is known -- that which is revealed. It is not to second-guess. The ministry must be preaching that which is known and understood.

No human being has the ability to read hearts and minds. Even in the times of the Old Testament, under the terms of the Old Covenant, God had to give the priests of that day and time a special means by which to ascertain the heart and intent of the person under investigation. He gave the Urim and Thummim. Since the time of Christ no such devices have been available for use by the New Testament ministry. The reason is quite obvious. Under the terms of the New Covenant, no judgment was to be administered. Now is not the time. Therefore, what cannot be known -- the intents and purposes of heart and mind -- must not be judged until the appointed time. At that time the minds and hearts will be read by God and the individuals will be judged accordingly.

On the other hand, what can be known, that which is manifested -- the works of the flesh -- is to be dealt with immediately. For

example, one who deliberately works on the Sabbath or Holy Days needs not to wait for the revelation of purpose and intent. The manifestation is already there. For by their fruits you can know them.

In divorce and remarriage cases, it is generally impossible to read the purpose and intent of the individuals involved in earlier marriages. In most cases such information cannot be made known until the judgment. Obviously, if a couple lived together for years and had children, dwelled together in harmony in the Church, and separated over factors which are not spiritually relevant, such a divorce would not be acceptable in the sight of God. Anyone involved in such a situation could not be allowed to continue in the Body of Christ. But, what we should all realize about judging is this: What is known -- not what one thinks -- is the basis of judgment. When we are not privy to such intimate knowledge, as God is, it is an obvious indication that we are not in a position to judge.

Such areas as healing, doctoring, other health pursuits, divorce, remarriage, and many other areas are fraught with difficulties -- difficulties involving one's faith, circumstances of the past, and a host of unknowns. How can an intelligent judgment be made until the secrets of the hearts are made known? This unknown element will be made known at the time of the appointed judgment. Until that time, we are required to act in faith, tolerance, patience, and respect. At that time all of us will stand before Him naked and bare. Nothing will be hidden. These are the realities we all must face regarding decisions which we will make respecting our own lives.

Today, we all live in glass houses. Should we not be careful how we judge others? That is, judgment which involves the unknown. What is known is not a judgment. It is a manifestation of the flesh. And what is manifested is known. What is known can be used as a basis of "judgment" at the present time. Really, it is not a judgment as such, but a simple rendering of a relevant decision. An example of the application of this principle is that of the requirement to avoid those who do not hold to the principles of the faith once delivered. If a person does not espouse the doctrines of the initial faith, we are commanded on that authority which proceeds from God to have no fellowship with them.

What is known we can use as a basis for decisions we are required to make at this present time. What is not known must be left untouched until God elects to make the necessary revelation.

One other principle needs to be briefly addressed. There are many situations which require mercy, understanding, and a completely forgiving spirit. Such situations should be mutually buried and forgotten. To do this requires no more than a mere remembrance of the

need to have God overlook many of our own shortcomings. If we want God to be merciful towards us, we are equally required to be merciful to others. It is only self-righteousness which would keep us from being very merciful to others. For when we see ourselves for what we really are, we can only have compassion on others.

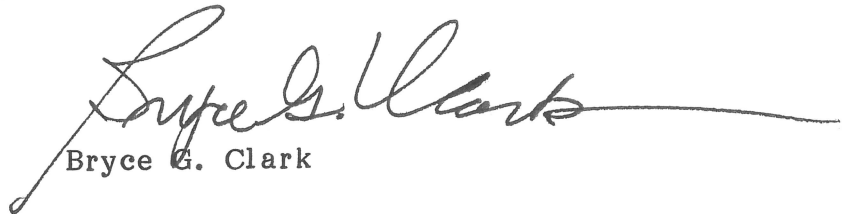
It is my hope that the subject of judgment and mercy has been sufficiently covered to allow us to move on to other and equally meaningful subjects. Let us learn to apply the meaning of all principles enunciated by God. Unusual emphasis upon one subject usually leaves some other concept wanting. Balance requires wisdom, understanding, and a goodly portion of the Spirit of God. With that Spirit we can also manifest a love which encompasses the whole world.

As always brethren, we convey our heartfelt love and admiration. Our prayers are always with and for you. We know that God will continue to bless you as you yield your lives into His perfect hands.

With deep regard and affection,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large, prominent loop at the beginning of the first name.

Raymond C. Cole

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Bryce G. Clark". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending from the end of the last name.

Bryce G. Clark