

# Church of God, The Eternal

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June, 1992

Dear Brethren:

In the March issue of this *Letter*, the subject of "The Orientation of God's Holy Word—The Bible" was commenced. The first six books called the epistles part of the Bible were analyzed. In chronological sequence those books are James to II Corinthians.

Let us, now, analyze the remaining 15 General and Pauline Epistles—written as instructions to churches founded in the first century but intended for those called in the last days. The content of these epistles will make clear the unique troubling problems surfacing in our own day.

## The Book of Romans (57 A.D.)

Paul's epistle to the Romans was written around 57 A.D. It quite likely is the most legalistic book of the New Testament. Paul defends his apostleship, the gospel of Christ as delivered to him, and the transition from a physical orientation to that of a spiritual one. He shows, to Gentiles, how those who received the letter of the law and way of life had perverted it even though they had come to know God. This typified what was happening to those called to know God and the truth spiritually. These events indicate what would happen to those called in the last days. Chapter two is a dire warning against those who forget that a day of judgment is inevitable. Not the proud and boastful, but the obedient will fare well at the time of that judgment. In chapter three we learn that there is an advantage to even a physical orientation. That Christ came making it possible to have complete forgiveness of all past sins. And that a faithful spiritual orientation does not abrogate the Law of God.

The premise of faithful, spiritual, obedience stems from a covenant relationship God entered into with Abraham, the father of the faithful. The physical—letter—events of his day prefigured the spiritual of our day.

By faith in the sacrifice of Christ we can have the forgiveness of sin. With such forgiveness we are reconciled to God—a favorable relationship which was originally destroyed because of sin. That sin is the cause of all death which has passed upon man—from the beginning.

The plan of reconciliation is spelled out clearly in chapter six. Being made free of the adversarial influence of the flesh, the called can now become the servants of righteousness. Being made free of the inherent dictates of flesh, the chosen now manifest, by fruits borne, the orientation of his life—physical or spiritual.

In chapter seven Paul explains the natural pulls of the flesh. Of his own might and strength, man is totally incapable of overcoming and mastering the nature created within him. With his mind he may understand what is required but the pulls of that flesh will gain the control unless a new power of self-negation is made available.

Chapter eight explains the operation of that power. Within its capabilities is the hope of complete freedom from tyrannical self. Such freedom is afforded those predestined to be called. Success is guaranteed to those who keep their eyes on Christ and effect complete mastery of the self.

All men are not called at this time. Chapter nine makes it abundantly clear that God established an order. All actions affecting men will transpire according to the long established and foreordained plan of God. That plan is based on a little understood transition from the physical—letter—to the spiritual, which is not affected by race or nationality.

In chapters ten and eleven Paul explains the purposes of the physical formation of Israel. In this context the possibilities for the Gentiles is addressed. Understanding God's plan for both Israelites and Gentiles is a matter of call and enlightenment—revelation of the truth, the purpose of God established from the foundation of the world.

Whether Israelite or Gentile, the called must surrender their lives unconditionally to Christ. Each one becomes a part of the body of Christ. In chapters 12 and 13 the spiritual responsibilities of the called are addressed. Urgency is imperative because of the time element involved. These are instructions recorded for the people of the last days.

Chapter 14 is a warning to all. Take care of your own specific responsibilities. Live according to the faith given. Do not indulge in the human tendency of judging and criticizing one another. Chapter 15 is an instruction to the spiritually strong. Bear the burdens of the weaker servants. Do not demand of them what they are at the time unable to bear. Recognize the ministry—those who are feeding you and through whom you gained the knowledge of what to do.

Finally, chapter 16 lays a very heavy burden upon the membership of the body of Christ—the church. Know the truth absolutely. On the basis of that knowledge take note of those who espouse contrary doctrines or in other ways create division and avoid them. Such do not serve God or Christ. On the contrary, they are serving themselves despite the glamorous and seemingly acceptable verbalizations which appeal to the weak and simple.

The basis of the judgment involved is the mysterious revelation of God's truth hidden from the foundation of the world.

### **The Book of Philippians (59–61 A.D.)**

First, Paul reassures those at Philippi that God did call and give them the truth. He further assures them of his continuing love and hope of salvation for them all. Paul knows and is confident in his relationship with God. He encourages the called to manifest the same conviction despite the fact that troubles prevailed in the church.

At all times and in all circumstances we are admonished to allow the mind and attitude of Christ to prevail. To assert and live the confident life in Christ. Holding confidently to that way of life given to them. Too frequently those called to teach and live that way of life delivered became self-seeking.

Though we may joy in the Lord, we are frequently confronted with troubling situations from within. We must always be able to determine those who seek their own and are not spiritually oriented. The truly faithful accept the fellowship of His (Christ's) sufferings. Take note of those who walk confidently and faithfully. Walk in that way for many had become the enemies of Christ.

The conclusion: Stand firm in the initial call—the truths accepted from the beginning. Despite turmoil and trouble, the orientation pleasing and acceptable to God is one of confidence, peace, honesty, truthfulness, integrity, and love toward all. The foundation of that confidence is in faithful obedience to the way initially accepted. It is manifested in an acceptable, benevolent understanding in all things.

### **The Book of I Peter (61 A.D.)**

Peter emphasizes two things: His apostleship and the election of those to whom he wrote. Though called to life everlasting they were then encountering severe trial. Because Christ could not be seen or heard, the trial was a severe test of faith. The lessons of history are recorded for the benefit of those subsequently called. Future success is dependent upon a positive mental orientation, not returning to the ways of flesh. In faith we know our call and new begettal.

As beings called and begotten, we must endeavor to suppress all manifestations of the flesh. If anyone fails in faith that does not mean the purpose of God will fail. For the few who will endure, they will form a part of the base of the Kingdom of God. Even though kingdoms of this world do not recognize who the faithful are, they are destined for

leadership. Until that time, the faithful must be submissive to the powers that be. Suffering for belief is acceptable to God.

Apparently considerable strife was manifested in the family relationship. Peter lays out the ground rules for a harmonious relationship. The real problem was the tongue and, of course, the mind which gives direction to the tongue. Do not defend the self, accept graciously whatever trials are allowed. It is an honor to suffer for the truth delivered.

With regard to suffering and trial, let us manifest the same orientation evidenced in the life of Christ. Manifest faith and confidence. Know that you are walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. A form of judgment is at work.

Finally, Peter gives instructions to the ministry called and sent to work under him. They bear responsibility over the flock. Their orientation must come from love not tyranny.

### **The Book of Colossians (62 A.D.)**

For those called and transferred from darkness to light, admonition is given to pursue faithfully the true way and to walk worthy of that call. Our example and Head is Christ—the preeminent beginning of the purpose of God. The church is the continuation of the physical body of Christ. We are members of that physical body if we continue in that faith, grounded and settled.

Paul was under constant conflict endeavoring to sustain those called in Colosse. Proof of obedience was found in faithfulness to the mystery as taught by Paul. Pressure was brought to bear upon the called because there were major deceptions occurring within. The way to know and by which to be assured was faithfulness to that which they had received from the beginning. Paul warns: Do not be taken in by philosophy, deceit, elements of the world, and/or traditions of men. The real test occurred relative to God's holy days. Do not be moved from faithfulness by deceptive orientations regarding the holy days. If we are truly called we have laid aside all deceptive practices.

Being called, let us put our all into the spiritual endeavor. Our hope of the future is dependent upon that complete and unequivocal orientation. Our basic duty is self-mastery. Such mastery is dependent upon the destruction of the flesh, first; followed by the determined acquisition of the spiritual orientation.

In chapter four a number of generalized instructions are advanced. How we discharge our relationships with others is critical.

### **The Book of I Timothy (62 A.D.)**

False doctrine was creeping into the church at Ephesus. Members were mesmerized with their family backgrounds, generating doctrinal fantasy, and assuming ministerial responsibility. They had turned from the original faith and were asserting concepts generated from their own minds.

The commission and integrity of Paul were questioned. Feminism was rearing its subversive head. Arguments about the responsibility and initial guilt of Adam and Eve—as these relate to all men and women—must have been common.

In the most specific terms the Apostle Paul laid down the qualifications necessary to hold office in the church—either that of a minister or a "deacon." Hypocrisy was totally unacceptable. A minister must be an example of what he preaches. In like manner, a deacon must live an exemplary life.

Based on reality of the present, Paul was inspired to reveal circumstances which would affect the church in the last days. Due to an unseen demonic influence, the church in the last days would be induced to turn from divine revelation. The faith would be replaced with strange new doctrines. Hypocrisy would prevail and the institution of marriage would be hindered. A good, faithful minister will put the members in constant remembrance of these conditions. Further, he will refuse to countenance or accept any manifestations of that which rejects the original faith.

Family relationships and economic responsibilities are defined. Weaknesses of men and assertiveness of women were troubling the church. Ordination, rewards to, and correction of ministers discussed. Too frequently patronization on the part of the minister must have been noted.

Rebellion against any form of government was surfacing. Any doctrine or conception to the contrary is a manifestation of perversity and a corruption of the mind. A stable, contented, and confident mind is the hallmark of the faithful. A significant manifestation of a perversion of mind is an unacceptable monetary orientation. The greatest need for the ministry and laity alike is a continuing fight to maintain the faith once delivered. The thrust of opposition was coming from a pseudo scientific basis—both historically and technically.

### **The Book of Philemon (62 A.D.)**

Paul writes to Philemon on the behalf of Onesimus. He beseeches Philemon to once again accept Onesimus—giving evidence that he yet believes in upholding vested authority. Onesimus was an indentured servant of Philemon.

### **The Book of Ephesians (63 A.D.)**

The awesome purpose of God blueprinted from the foundation of the world. That purpose involves the called—faith in the truth as originally taught. Central to that purpose is Christ who is manifested in the body of the church.

Unconverted men walk according to the natural course of this world—existing under the influence of the devil, the god of this world. Though Gentiles, the Ephesians were provided a way by which they could be partakers of the commonwealth of Israel. They, too, were, as the called, to be built upon the foundation of Christ and the apostles.

To the above end Paul had been called and commissioned, an apostle to all Gentiles. The called must not despair at the trials of those sent to do the work of God.

Being called of God to become one body, the chosen must endeavor to maintain that order and unity. To accomplish the work of God, an organizational structure was established by God. Effectiveness in that structure was entirely dependent upon the total surrender of the self—complete renewal of mind. The self was to be repressed and totally crushed.

Judicious care must consistently be exercised to avoid deception based on natural pulls and the tendency to respond to those who reject the singularity of the way of life. Based upon the example of natural marriage, Paul explains the creation and structure of the body of Christ—the church.

As children must be obedient to parents, so the children of God must obey God. To sustain faith in the way of life requires the whole armor of God, with diligent attention to daily prayer.

### **The Book of Titus (63 A.D.)**

Through ordained ministerial preaching the truth is made known. Qualifications of that ministry are listed. Emphasis is laid upon the crucial tenet of faithfulness to the Word delivered to him. A principal reason for such a requirement is the tendency of natural man to return to the ways of deceptive flesh. Such retain an outward appearance of spiritual orientation but their works deny their claims.

Faithfulness to the various levels of responsibility created by God is addressed. The ministry must be faithful to the Word given. Aged women must manifest submissiveness and a willingness to teach the younger the unalterable truths. Laborers must be taught the necessity of faithfulness.

All people must be taught the necessity of subjection to the physical governments of constituted authority. Mental and physical character is mandatory. The called must manifest quiescence, faith, and complete self-discipline. Any deviation from the revealed truth must be marked and handled by rejection—both by the ministry and the laity.

### **The Book of II Peter (63–64 A.D.)**

According to the divine power of God all which is necessary for life everlasting is given to the called. If we lack that vision or faith we prove ourselves to be blind. Rather than worry about the validity of that which has been given to us we should be earnestly endeavoring to master the self. The duty of the ministry is to consistently inspire to greater endeavors, personally. Preoccupation with prophecy is vain. God alone can and will reveal the intent of that which is written.

The basis for the above warnings is found in chapter two. Here we are warned of the diabolical nature of man, even though called. As prophets assumed inspiration in the time of ancient Israel so in these last days false teachers would surface. Tragically the many will follow the deceivers because of power and the influence of individuals involved as well as the natural inclination to follow that which has fleshly appeal. The basics of that appeal: natural contempt for any authority or government; the natural mental inclinations of the flesh; the desire for immediate reward; and a willingness to believe whatever they are told. Though such are promised life, they really are in the way of destruction. At all cost, we should remain faithful to the Word which was delivered to us. Faithfulness without any element of hypocrisy, innuendo, or assumption.

Remember the prognostication regarding scoffers and the humanly self-styled. Too many, because of past false assumptions, have lost confidence in the time of the return of Jesus Christ. God's timing is exact. You can count on it. Unless we are Biblically alert, the day of that great event will catch us unawares. Because of the certainty of that monumental event, let those who remain responsive to the will of God make sure their calling. Do not be moved by the rantings of anyone. Be faithful. At the same time grow spiritually.

### **The Book of II Timothy (65 A.D.)**

Because the seeds of apostasy were surfacing Paul instructs Timothy to harken back to his background and call. He was called by an unchanging Christ. Though ridicule was pervasive, we should have faith in the call and the truth given.

Timothy is instructed to remain faithful to that which he (Paul) had taught. Be unbending, yet masterful. Endure for the sake of the called. Endeavor to avoid perversion of God's Word. Have no part with fable or heresy. Remember, in any organization there will always be found both the honest and those whose orientation is wrong. Your duty is to faithfully teach the unalterable way. Be kind and understanding, knowing that such are led by a foreign spirit.

In the last days, those who have departed from the faith will manifest some of the most injurious and hateful characteristics possible for man. They will maintain a religious orientation, studying and asserting themselves, yet never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. That truth is the way which they had previously rejected. Conditions will continue to deteriorate. The duty of the faithful is to remain unmovable in the way of life to which they had been called.

Paul admonished Timothy to preach the Word—revealed Word—and rebuke where necessary. Too many will turn from the truth and will give ear to those who are espousing strange and perverted doctrine. Full proof of the ministry given is manifested in faithfulness to call and duty. Regardless of criticism and ridicule from those who once understood, the true minister must remain faithful. God will reward the faithful in His own time.

### **The Book of Jude (65 A.D.)**

Due to urgency and severity of the problem Jude was inspired to address the same issues the Apostle Peter had addressed one to two years earlier. Too many had lost faith in their initial call and the truth which had been given to them. Spiritual perverts had slipped into the church. They were appealing to the natural inclinations of men. A false concept of love was pervasive. With such a concept came the more devastating denial of Christ. Hate and contempt of government and order became common. Without knowing it these people, once called and faithful to the truth, were now walking in the way of Cain.

They continued to exist in the body—sporting themselves arrogantly among the faithful membership during the observance of God's ordained holy days. Further, they are consistent complainers. They manifest no fruits of faith and continuity of purpose. They orient to men—not to the unalterable doctrine. On the other side of the coin are found those who labor diligently trying to bring about a resurgence of faith and conviction. Continuing in that faith will produce fruit—the fruit of everlasting life.

### **The Book of Hebrews (66–67 A.D.)**

Only relevant parts of this book will be addressed here. Most of the arguments which surfaced in the church at Jerusalem related to legalism—the transition from the time of the old to the commencement of the new.



The authenticity of Christ established. The office and responsibilities of angels made plain. These initiate Paul's writings to the Hebrews.

Having been called to understand, the chosen must give special attention to that which was heard. What occurred in the life of Jesus Christ was an example of what could occur to men if faithful to the call.

Christ was faithful to His call and responsibility. According to plan He formed a house—His own house—the church. When called we must remain faithful. The basis of that faith is that which we were given initially, a confidence which we must retain unto the end. Ancient Israel was cited as an example of unfaithfulness. They were not faithful to that which had been given to them. Therefore, faithfulness of those called since Christ is manifested in continuity of belief from the beginning and steadfast confidence in that call.

Chapter four is an elaboration on the example of Israel. Confidence (rest) is the hallmark of those who really believe. Facing ourselves for what we are, we can confidently come before the throne of God—asking for personal forgiveness.

As the priests were chosen of God so also are His ministers today. No one dare assume such a responsibility. Christ is the example of a called and commissioned minister.

In chapters six, seven, eight, nine, and ten we find verification and certification of Christ—His call, commission, and purpose. He is the Initiator of the New Testament ministry. In that New Testament administration the same laws apply although from a spiritual perspective and not that of the letter—physical. The laws, statutes, and judgments of God are to be written into hearts and minds of those called.

Acceptance of the above requires total faith. This faith is addressed in chapter 11. Men and women of the Old, in faith, looked forward to the day of Christ. Now, in faith, we look back to the work of Christ in His own day as well as that work which currently occurs from within those called.

Looking back, in faith and confidence, to the prophets and Christ Himself we are admonished to lay aside every matter which tends to obstruct our progress in the call tendered. Let us accept the purpose for which God allows trials, persecutions, and chastisement. Effect self-mastery and self-discipline in order to avoid contempt and bitterness. Earth shaking events are destined to occur. Will we be discouraged because of them? Let the faithful endure to the end.

Finally, Paul addresses a number of miscellaneous issues. Essential prayer. Daily prayer for one another. In sexual matters only marriage is honorable to God. Watch conversation and attitude. Remember those to whom God gave church rule. Do not be

moved doctrinally. Praise and extol God consistently. Know and listen carefully to those who are the true and honest servants of God.

### **The Book of I John (88 A.D.)**

John is emphasizing that he, and others called, had from the beginning heard and seen the truth—the Word, Jesus Christ. What they had seen and heard they were continuing to proclaim. That what they had seen and heard was light, and that it was in no way darkness. Any who claim to know God cannot believe that they live in partial darkness. Yet, we cannot claim to be perfect in self-mastery, without sin. We must recognize what we are and consistently seek forgiveness through repentance.

Only the legitimate really know Christ although many claim such knowledge. The basis of that knowledge is that which was initially received. That which was heard from the beginning. In the last day—time—a separation would occur. A refining process is taking place. The test? Will we allow that which we received from the beginning to remain in us? Or, will we give ear to some who have willed to depart? Know that a need for new instruction does not exist. We have heard the truth from the beginning. Confidence exists only in the pursuit of the initial faith and conviction.

Personal purification is essential. Those who effect self-mastery will see Christ. If we abide in that which we have received we will not be deceived. Personal animosities are a manifestation of carnality. The faithful are overcomers.

Belief and acceptance of everyone who comes along with a message is forbidden. The test is this: Anyone who believes that Christ, presently, is come in the flesh, is of God. Anyone who does not accept the continuing presence of Christ in the flesh is not of God. Christ continues in the fleshly body of the church. Those who are on the right track are those who know and confess that Christ *is* present.

The faithful are those who believe that Jesus is the Christ. Remember what Christ is! Only those who real believe Jesus is the Christ will overcome—effect self-discipline and self-mastery in their lives. John knew that Jesus had come, in the flesh, in his day; so must we know, today, that Jesus *IS* come in the flesh.

### **The Book of II John (88–89 A.D.)**

John again writes to the church assuring them of their original faith and confidence—that which they had received from the beginning. There were many at that time who had lost their faith and confidence, even denying that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh—at that very time. Some were not abiding in the doctrine of Christ. Only those

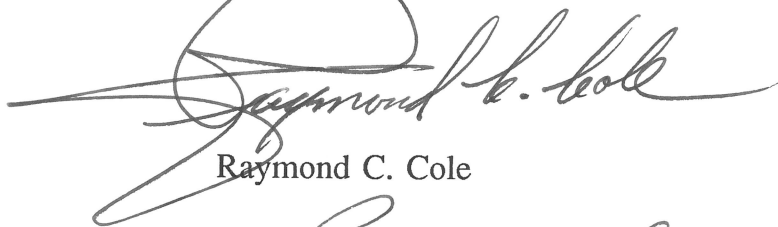
who do not move laterally—those who continue to practice that which they initially accepted—are the genuine children of God. Those who depart and attempt to dissuade others must be rejected and with whom no fellowship is allowed. To have any such relationship makes the defiant equally guilty.

### The Book of III John (90–91 A.D.)

John again writes to the church. By this time even the Apostle John, along with other members, was not received. Some had arrogantly seized political control of the church and were casting out the faithful. They were maliciously speaking about the true members. He admonishes to remain faithful to the truth—that which was initially given.

That concludes all the instructional epistles which had been written to the various churches or the ministers involved. If you can recall the initial purpose of these two *Letters*, mentioned in the March issue, you will have gained a very significant understanding why these books were written. The contents of all were, of course, written for us upon whom the ends of the age are come. In every case, the writing was necessitated as an endeavor to keep the called on the narrow way of life. Our duty, today, is to consistently warn against departure. To encourage the faithful to close ears to the deceptions which are prophesied to prevail in these last days. It is our duty to warn and teach. We trust and pray that you will willingly respond, remaining faithful to the words of life initially given. Our love and prayers are always with you.

In much faith and confidence,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Raymond C. Cole".

Raymond C. Cole

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bryce G. Clark".

Bryce G. Clark