

# Church of God, The Eternal

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June 1996

Dear Brethren:

With this issue of the *Monthly Letter* comes the passing of one-half of 1996. And what a half-year it has been. In retrospect we are left puzzled yet confident. Puzzled because much of what is yet to happen is not thoroughly understood. And confident because we are seeing the unfolding of the last day events—a physical confirmation of our past belief and trust. The future can only grow darker and more foreboding. It will require faith—lots of it—to endure to the end.

In May we were beginning to understand just who, among all the divergent and professing *Christian* people, really does see and understand the truth. From previous issues we have seen clearly, if we have read and comprehended that which is written, that human beings of themselves cannot know and understand the truth. The truth must be revealed. The eyes must be opened to see and the ears to hear the truth of God. A miracle is essential. A call given. And a special revelation from God.

Such a miraculous beginning, however, is not a spiritual guarantee in itself. The pulls of the flesh and mind are powerful. Satan has access to the hearts and minds of many. Short of a recognition of one's own weaknesses, daily repentance to God, and above all faith in the implicit and unalterable truth revealed—by which to judge all mental temptations and trials—even the called can, and often do, turn from that which God gave. A call and revelation from God are one thing. The ability and determination to endure are quite something else.

## **Must Remain Faithful to Call and Purpose**

Christ addressed this very problem. At one time many purported to believe Him. They heard His words and were spontaneously inclined to respond. To them He said: "If ye *continue* in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). Christ implies continuity is a human problem. Indeed! Yet, to some extent God even desires that we do not

alter the conditions and circumstances at the time of call (I Cor. 7:20, 24). In fact, there is a very subtle hint that one should stop to consider the attitude, dedication, fervency, and other factors apparent in our lives at the time of our individual calls. It was at that time we viewed our call a great miracle of major significance. However, the lessons of ancient Israel portray the tendency to grow weary and to become hardened and indifferent mentally.

God considered this concept of continuity so significant that the Apostle Paul emphasized it twice. Consistency in orientation and purpose is of great value to God. This must surely be contrasted with the wavering, changeable, and volatile nature of man. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Man cannot be trusted. Is it any wonder Christ conditioned His acceptance of those who claimed to be His servants? "If you *continue* in my word, then are you my disciples!" And years later that same Spirit which ruled the mind of Christ inspired the Apostle Paul to write to the Ephesians, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. 4:1). God calls each of us under specific circumstances, individually, and for specific purposes and responsibilities (I Cor. 12:4-11, 18, 28). Remaining a viable part of that body—which is the promised continuation of the very body of Jesus Christ himself—is dependent upon continuity and orientation of mind manifested at the time of the initial call. Note how Paul admonished the Ephesians to walk—that is, to think, to live, and to behave. He instructed the members of the body in the area of Ephesus to walk "with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:2-3). Why was the Apostle Paul emphasizing such continuity and self-control? Because "there is one body, and one Spirit [mind], even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:4-6). To be a part of the body of Christ requires complete and total surrender of the self. A condition almost impossible for any given human being—called or uncalled. The classic example is that of acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the very Word of God in the flesh, the unalterable Truth itself. No, we are not talking about the so-called Christ, or the words of life, which men have constructed in their own minds. We are referring to that way, that truth, which is absolutely contrary to all that is thought and conceived in the hearts and minds of men. That which comes only by a divine miracle. That way which is revealed only once. If and when rejected there remains no further capability for repentance or return to the truth.

### **The Body Identified**

Hearing, believing, accepting, and remaining faithful to that truth is a formidable task made possible only by the presence and indwelling power of the Holy Spirit working within us and assisted by the consistent crucifixion of the self.

Where is such a body? A body of individuals who have surrendered their wills and have personally yielded their lives—their minds—to a common objective, the one Spirit (mind), one doctrine, and one faith? These are the spiritual Jews mentioned earlier in this series of letters. These are the continuation of the true body of Christ (Eph. 5:30, Col. 1:24). Somewhere they exist today. Why? How can we know? Because Jesus Christ is coming back to an existing body, not bodies—the Church, not churches. He is to marry a wife, not wives. Discovering and knowing that body becomes problematic due to a number of factors. Within their structure is to be found a mixed variety of *professing* and weak individuals. Some have crept into the body (Jude 4). There are those whom God has allowed to gain entrance for the benefit of the called (I Cor. 11:19). There are the tares among the wheat (Matt. 13:24–30). Among them will be found those who have no real or genuine love for the truth (II Thess. 2:9–15). Also, among them will be those who will make no sacrifice for God or Christ. They will not go beyond specific commands or requirements (Matt. 25:31–46, Luke 17:1–10, Heb. 10:23–27). There was a mixed multitude who followed Israel out of Egypt. Because of specific situations there were times God allowed a motley mixture of human beings to exist among the called Israelites—always to test and prove the character, determination, and obedience of His called (Judges 2:20–23; 3:1, 4). In like manner such conditions will prevail in our day. Here a guiding principle is most imperative. "By their fruits, ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). Why is such judgment necessary? All who claim a call and conversion are not legitimate or honest (Matt. 7:21–23).

Apparently out of the many who claim conversion there exists no more than a tiny group who are the truly called. Few (Matt. 7:13–14) will fight the real fight of faith (I Tim. 6:12). Those who will endure to the end (Matt. 24:12–13). Trials and difficulties have the power of robbing far too many of their first love and enthusiasm (II Thess. 2:9–12). Their latter years are often fraught with compromise and a form of worship which does not proceed from the heart and mind. It is mechanical, ritualistic. Such cannot, indeed will not, endure the real tests of faith prognosticated for the future.

### Why So Few?

Observable over the months and years is a characteristic reluctance to effect real examination and personal acceptance of individual weaknesses—seeking the help of God to overcome and manifesting a correct orientation in effecting a required change. Usually what is seen is a form of rationalizations—self-justifications—which in turn will allow the parties involved to continue comfortably in "the way of perishing." No human being will long continue in a posture of realized guilt. Either necessary change will be made or a form of rationalization will be fabricated. Such people will no longer hold the self subject to close scrutiny. As Christ said, *they love darkness*. Light is too revelatory and painful. In Biblical parlance, these are the people in the way of perishing. Though such people are practicing

self-deception, the fruits manifested are most revealing. Visibly they are living the way of the flesh. In contrast, the way of truth—God's way of life—is called *the faith*. And faith is the evidence of things not seen. It is the continuity of belief initially heard and then accepted on the basis of that required faith.

In our effort to logically and sequentially follow the call and conversion of human beings let us not get ahead of ourselves. We need to remember the time of the initial call. At that time a miracle of major significance occurred. Let us understand what happened.

### **Mind Opened—Heart Responsive**

By nature, the carnal mind is opposed to God and His way. It has no interest in anything but the lustful appetites of the self—the so-called pleasures of sin. It is rebellious and defiant.

Somewhere in the course of this natural behavior sane and contemplative thought emerges. Who am I? What is happening? Is this—present conditions—my lot in life? And a host of other questions. In general, many will turn to the Bible. Yet little understanding comes. Bewilderment and confusion reign in all areas of Biblical study. The called, in all probability traumatized by the emerging realization that what was believed and practiced had no real efficacy or merit, are now further bewildered by the maze of religious concepts with which they are faced. A world of confusion surrounds them. But, as a called individual such turmoil does not exist long. In the process of this traumatized time, a voice is heard. A glimmer of light is experienced. Hope surges. An element of understanding comes. What is happening? Exactly the same as that which occurred in the minds and hearts of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. That which they had heard many times over the years, the written Scriptures, now from the lips of Jesus Christ seemed to have relevancy. At the appointed time, as determined by God, their minds were opened and hearts softened. This was a miracle. That which Christ had done Luke expressed in this manner, "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45). Just moments earlier, Christ had made Himself known to them (v. 32). Recognition and acceptance of the truth of God is always equated with the recognition and acceptance of the servant of God employed in the conveyance of that revealed way of life.

That which was occurring to the disciples was the fulfillment of a statement made by Christ many months earlier (Matt. 13:11, 16). Men, by natural inclination, do not understand the truth. Their natural eyes are blinded to spiritual things. They cannot see and understand. Natural minds do not comprehend spiritual things (I Cor. 2:11, 14). Before understanding is possible, something has to happen. Eyes and ears must be opened miraculously. And such understanding is a monumental blessing—blessing from God only (Matt. 13:16).



As were the eyes and ears of the disciples opened, so, also, did others experience this great blessing. Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, was the recipient of this special blessing. As she listened to Paul, she heard because her "heart the Lord opened" (Acts 16:14). And to the church at Ephesus he wrote: I "cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling. . ." (Eph. 1:16-18).

A call must be tendered—and can come only from God. Then, our eyes and ears must be opened. Simultaneous to the miracle of spiritual insight occurs another wonder. The truly called can now hear the truth proclaimed by chosen servants of God.

### **The Called Hear and See**

In a rather long dissertation by Jesus Christ the principles involved in this concept were made abundantly clear. Allow us to quote a goodly portion of what He said. ". . . If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? *He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.* Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth" (John 8:42-50).

Powerful words, indeed! But, even as they are read most do not hear what is said—nor do they understand that which is stated. How do you *know* that which you accept and believe is truly the word of God? Among the myriad counterfeits prevailing today, there is one—and *one* only—way which is of God. How do we know that fact? Because God's Word says so emphatically (Eph. 4:3-6, John 14:6). How many true Christs were there? If only one then there is only one truth—doctrine. Is it possible to *know* that true way of life? Indeed! Yet, it is known only by those called and who by exercising required character remain steadfast to that knowledge which was revealed at the time of call and conversion. When people, though once called and converted, turn from the first delivered faith, they create concepts made from the fabric of their own minds. In no way can it be called a *faith*. In every sense of the word what they have created and accepted is a perversion, alteration, or change which

is more satisfying to the natural, carnal, mind. In some cases it even allows those who subscribe to such changes to fit more acceptably into the frame of family, society, or religious community. Such an orientation neutralizes the requirement to come out of the world and be not among them.

When facing Pilate, at the time of His trial, Christ again spoke of this matter. He said in response to a specific question by Pilate, ". . . To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John 18:37). Inherent in acceptance of truth is the required acceptance of the Messenger. The only way the people could accept what Christ was teaching was first to accept Him as the one who was conveying that truth. If the person speaking is not honored, respected, accepted, how is it possible for anyone to accept the message being delivered? Tragically, this same orientation allows for much deception. Why? If some are inclined to accept a person for reasons, other than the truth itself, they will follow that individual into error. Such is the nature of sheep; and, we must remember that we are sheep.

Who can and will hear the voice of Christ? Those who are called, converted, and truly fear God. Those who know the faithful servant of God in his appointed time. Unwillingness to accept, or even to believe the principle involved, has led many people into gross error and ultimate separation from the body of Christ. Even in our own day we have seen these results transpire several times.

In the day of the Apostle John the issue of hearing and responding to the truth became a very sensitive and contentious matter. Based on a statement of John himself, we can know that even those called were troubled and were seeking some verification for their belief and faith. To them John said, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God . . . Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ *is* [right at that moment] come in the *flesh* is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ *is* [see above] come in the *flesh* is not of God . . . . Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They [apparently some of the called who once knew and understood the truth] are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and *the world heareth them*. We are of God: *he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us*. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (I John 4:1-6). Is the above an assertion of arrogance and conceit on the part of the Apostle John? Absolutely not! John knew that he knew the truth. Why? Because He had accepted the Messenger and that the truth had been delivered to him. Therefore, those who heard him heard the truth. Those who refused to accept him heard not the truth. We will apply this to our time shortly.

Neither was a dogmatic assertion of Christ evidence of any arrogance and conceit on His part. He said emphatically, "Ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath

sent, him ye believe not" (John 5:38). Implied here, emphatically, is this fact: Those who have the truth of God will recognize those who likewise possess it as all who have the truth within themselves will recognize and respect that individual who is sent. That individual to whom God gave the truth and who continues to proclaim that way of life.

Who has the truth? Those who hear and respect those sent by God. Who is sent and honored by God? That individual who remains faithful to call, the way of life received, and who honors that one called and commissioned.

### How the Called Hear Today

The above is not a problem to those who narrowly apply it to the time of Christ, and perhaps to the following apostles, the twelve, and later Paul. They, however, have great difficulty accepting its relevancy to our time. Christ addressed this inherent difficulty. He said, "He that receiveth you [the twelve initially, but also applies to all generations who would follow His time] receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (Matt. 10:40). In Luke's version of Christ's admonition a considerable emphasis was added. "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me" (Luke 10:16). To turn against one called and commissioned of God is to despise both the Father and the Son. Failure to hear the words of one sent is to reject both Father and Son. A most serious infraction. When John wrote of this matter he put a little different emphasis upon it. He did not even limit the meaning in a general way. He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth *whomsoever* I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (John 13:20). John left no doubt about the comprehensiveness of Christ's statement. It involved not only the twelve but also any others whom God in appointed times would call and commission.

A few years after the commission of the twelve apostles, another was specifically assigned, the Apostle Paul. His commission was given specific parameters. Certain limiting dimensions also applied to Christ (Matt. 15:24). No mere mortal correctly assumes the office of a minister. Neither does he decide the nature and extent of his office of responsibility. How greatly and contemptuously do men assume *rights* and *privileges*. The work to be done is called the *work of God*. It is not a work assumed by men and justified by the rationalizations of minds and hearts. It is a work being done by God—even though it is being wrought through the agency of men. Paul certainly understood the limits and purposes of the ministry. To the Romans he wrote, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Rom. 10:13–15). A comprehensive statement is it not? God must call that one whom He wills to speak His

words and then he must be commissioned—sent. From among the masses God will call some and allow them to hear the message being proclaimed. There is no other way for the sheep to hear the voice of God—the truth being proclaimed by the one sent. Why? Because it is the method of operation chosen by God (I Cor. 1:21). In general the world cannot hear and understand the truth, nor know God. Only those called, whose ears and eyes are opened, will know both the truth and God who gives it. They, exactly as the Bible technically states, will have heard it through a chosen servant of God. Response and faithfulness to that which they heard become the responsibilities of each one called.

### **Acceptance and Belief**

The next step? Once the called hear and begin to understand they must accept and believe. Easily accepted initially for most who are called but incredibly difficult to maintain over the years of living. The flush of first love has its many benefits. But the called have proven nothing until they endure to the end. Christ at the time of His last Passover spoke of this matter. He was addressing the Father. He said, "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:2–3). How is it possible to come to know two Beings whom we, humanly, have never seen or about whom we have no knowledge? Remember, nearly all who are either called God, or Christ, are false. They are not the true Ones. How can the true Ones be known? Regarding spiritual principles, Christ said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and *no man knoweth* the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he *to whomsoever the Son will reveal him*" (Matt. 11:25–27). Christ's statement leaves little room for doubt. Salvation is to know the Father and the Son. Yet, no man can know them except by divine revelation. To know Christ is to know what? He is the Word of God, the way of life, the truth itself (John 1:1, 14; 14:6). In knowing Him we know the truth, the way of life—that which is unalterable. You cannot know Him without knowing the truth. He is the truth.

Revelation is necessary because both God, the Father, and Christ, the Son, are composed of Spirit. Spirit is not seen by the eyes of flesh. It can be comprehended only by a special miracle which affects our minds and hearts. Yet, once called and a special spiritual revelation occurs those receiving that call cannot turn back to the natural skepticism of flesh. They must continue to believe and trust that which they have never seen. It requires faith (Heb. 11:1). And of even greater significance is this: Without faith—the evidence of things which we cannot see with our natural eyes—it is absolutely impossible for any man to live a life pleasing to God (Heb. 11:6).

## Who?

Who are the called and faithful? Those who are living the life of faith and conviction. They heard the voice of God and Christ even though they saw neither in a physical sense. They know and believe. That faith is the manifestation—yes, even the certification—of the faithful. They are the ones who continue to accept the sacrifice made for them, to believe with their whole hearts and minds, and in the final analysis to literally walk in the way which leads to everlasting life (John 3:16). Who have the truth of God? Those who heard the message and responded. Those who surrendered their carnal lives wholly to God. Those who accepted that which was first delivered and have never allowed any changes of doctrine—truth—to plague their lives. These are the ones who are walking in the way of life, not in the way which leads to destruction. Interestingly, these are the people who are not *confounded* by the labyrinth of concepts generated due to apostasy. Their faith sustained them. They did not in any way reject Christ. Note how Peter explained the matter. ". . . Behold I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded [Greek is *kataischuno*: to shame down, i.e. disgrace or (by implication) put to blush—*Strong's*]. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed" (I Pet. 2:6–8).

Those who believe will not only manifest confidence at the present but will not endure shame and embarrassment in the future. They will suffer the indignities of fellow-human beings but they will not endure the shame and contempt reserved for those of faithlessness. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John 5:10–12). Of special significance is this question. Who has the Son? Claims are irrelevant. Whoever has the Son will manifest these characteristics. He will have heard the truth through a called and specially commissioned servant. He will have resident within himself an unchanging Spirit—mind. That which he accepted initially will remain viable and absolute. He will know that he has Christ and will not be confused and frustrated by others who have lost their perspective. He will know and respect that one through whom God worked. If one lacks any of the above principles he does not possess the Spirit of God—Christ is not resident within his life.

By now, it should be quite evident who has the truth. However, in the next issue of this letter covering the current subject, we want to observe and recognize the manifestations

of the life of Christ as they are lived in the called and chosen. Truly, *by their fruits they shall be known.*

Please know that you all are deeply loved and respected. You are the children of God as long as ye do well and continue to live according to that which was first given to you. Our prayers and thoughts of kindness will always be with you.

Your servants in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'R'.

Raymond C. Cole

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bryce G. Clark". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'B'.

Bryce G. Clark