

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

A warm and affectionate regard and greetings to you all. The month of August is now here. And with the passing of August comes the month in which we find the beginning of the final holydays for the calendar year, 1996. Preparations are already well under way. Your prayers are vitally needed. Only with a combined and purposeful determination and pursuit of responsibility can we ever achieve that which God's Holydays portray. Let us not make the observance of them a simple and trite mechanical duty. There must be much spiritual intent and meaning manifested in all our endeavors. In that way we can fulfill both the letter and the spiritual intent of these statutes of God. Since God is a purposeful God there is meaning to all that He requires of us. We cannot over-emphasize the need of reflecting upon these days and ascertaining why we observe them. If we do not understand the reasons inherent in the commands, how can we give direction to our minds and hearts? How can we judge and measure our growth and development in those spiritual responsibilities? Mechanical obedience alone is woeful inadequate. We must know why we are acting as we are. Plumbing the depth of our hearts and minds is imperative. When we *know* what we are doing and *why* we are doing it, faith is made possible. Man's major problem is this: He desires to live in the gray area of life so that he does not restrict his options. He refuses, basically, to live a life of commitment. That weakness is manifesting itself in nearly, if not all, the avenues of duty and action today. Marriage is a classical example. Also, reflect for a moment on the nature of conversation today. How many refuse to make any form of commitment? Indeed, the Christian must condition his statements, "If God wills." Yet, such a condition in no way implies indifference to commitment or responsibility. Our words, promises, and commitments must be honored. We are going to be judged by them.

Now, let us continue analyzing the subject, "Why the Written Word of God?" There is much more which needs to be presented before making any concrete and final judgments in the matter.

By way of resume, let us make a few broad generalizations. First, only the Biblically illiterate would deny a direct revelation to servants such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, the prophets, the twelve apostles, and the Apostle Paul. Yet, tragically, few will admit that a revelation of the intent and meaning of that which was given to those servants is necessary for those who live in years following that initial revelation. The assumption is that anyone can read the Bible—the record of those earlier revelations—and understand them. Second, no mortal man of his own accord, regardless of who he is and what level of education he possesses can comprehend the spiritual truths of God. Third, only those called and chosen of God can hear, spiritually understand, and act on those words of life which they heard.

For a goodly number of *Monthly Letters* adequate evidence has been adduced to substantiate the above generalizations for all who have taken time to read and study the material presented. For the uncalled and those who will not be instructed by Biblical principle it will matter little what depth and quantity of information is given. But, for the teachable, we like to present a plethora of evidence. That is the very reason for the length of this series of letters.

Last time, June 1996, we considered the subject of who it is that really understands the truth. Those called and chosen of God. Those whose minds and ears were opened to hear and comprehend. The subjects of an eternal purpose ordained of God. The recipients of a singular opportunity to obey and overcome. They know who they are and they know that they know the truth—that which they heard and received in faith and confidence. A way of life which they must hold fast without wavering. Reducing all the factors mentioned above to a common concept, based on broad observation, there are few, indeed, who really are faithful to the truth—those who are the called and the loyal remnant—the few mentioned by Christ himself (Matt. 7:13–14).

This month we would like to address the matter of manifestations of the called and faithful. By their fruits you shall know them. What are the fruits of faithfulness—fruits which indicate the identity of that small flock?

Proof of Those Who Heard and Responded

The called of God internally—in heart and mind—know who they are. They have no doubts. But, are there not manifest evidences—external indications—which are observable by even those who have not experienced the call? Manifestations to which one could point as evidence of sincerity, faithfulness, as well as evidences of claims made relevant to one's status, or relationship, with God, the Father? Indeed, there are. Those manifestations are the fruits borne—fruits which are the ultimate indication of the nature and type of the tree.

Faithfulness

With a broad brush one can paint the entire picture with one word: *Faithfulness*. So that term may take on a more comprehensive meaning, we need to consider the components of the concept. What is faithfulness? First, since truth must be revealed, and further, since truth is immutable, the one called of God and who remains faithful is one who does not change his beliefs subsequent to his call—those concepts which are unchangeable. At the same time, however, due to the inherent teaching of that unchanging truth, daily change is occurring in the physical and mental orientation of the one called. In essence, according to the unchanging way of truth, those natural concepts held and/or believed by the chosen are rejected and eliminated. They are putting on the divine nature. And spiritual concepts are replacing vile, erroneous, and evil traits. Therefore, the first manifestation of call and faithfulness is an unwavering confidence in that which was heard and which formed the basis of baptism and the covenant relationship entered into with Christ and God, the Father (John 8:31–32). If any carnal change occurs, it becomes obvious that such an individual never really heard the call of God or he has turned against the truth and is departing from God (II Cor. 4:1–4). In verse 3 the Greek implies progression, "being lost," "perishing." Both of these possibilities exist in these last days.

An Uncompromising Stature—Even Under Pressure

The second manifestation of a faithful servant was clearly illustrated by the Apostle Paul when writing to the young evangelist, Timothy. He said, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come . . . all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (II Tim. 3:1, 12–14). Many concepts will be proclaimed. Temptations will be acute. Yet, Paul emphasizes the necessity to avoid departure by simply adhering to that which was taught—that which was once received and embraced with faith and conviction. Imperative in this scenario is the need to manifest complete and unadulterated faith in that which was accepted at the time of call. The time when you heard the truth of God as it was proclaimed by that servant whom God called and commissioned. Further, it is absolutely necessary to recognize the fact that the men who departed from that original faith and are proclaiming an erroneous way are evil and bent on seduction. The true and faithful servant must experience trial and deep tribulation—even perilous conditions. From the time those trials and tests begin the conditions can and will only grow worse and worse. Yet, how simple and logical is the course of faithfulness. Simply hold to your original beliefs—beliefs which were received and respected before time could efface, wretchedness of carnal arrogance manifest itself, and the deceptive voice of Satan could be heard. Always remember the field of deception will proliferate and grow

more intense as the years and months pass. More and more urgent is the necessity of adhering to that which was received prior to the time of such deception. How else are you going to make intelligent decisions—decisions which are not clouded by carnality of one's own mind or the pressures of deceptive concepts advocated by those who have departed from the truth?

It is necessary, absolutely necessary, to *know* and to *believe* from the heart, God would in the last days first deliver the truth to a servant. Due to faithlessness an apostasy would occur. Deception—deep and cunning deception—would follow. For all called and chosen of God urgent decisions would be required. To make the only wise and intelligent decision one must know the sequence of events and then make sure that what he continues to believe came first, not that which came from his own mind, or that which resulted in change—any change. If one is going to change a little, why not accept all change? A little sin is still sin.

Where Should You Go?

The third concept of faithfulness which can be observed is submission to Christ—being a part of the body which Jesus Christ said would exist even in the last days. Too many, out of fear, have turned inward. They trust no one or anything. The general attitude manifested is a wait-and-see orientation. But such an attitude fails to address the need of faith, action, and submission to Christ. While the true body of Christ, even though it is but a remnant at this present time, moves forward, growing in knowledge, and personal mastery, those who are waiting on the sideline are inevitably losing ground, faith, and time.

Who is a part of the house of Christ?

The Apostle Paul eloquently explained the intricacies which we all face today. He said, "But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, *if* we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6). Continuing the same theme, Paul adds another dimension in verse 14. He said, "For we are made partakers of Christ, *if* we hold the *beginning* of our confidence steadfast unto the end." It is not merely a matter of confidence in some belief; on the contrary, it is imperative that we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. Those called and chosen faithful servants are the ones who hear the truth, respond initially, and then hold to that beginning conviction all the way to the end. They are members of a unique, peculiar, body—the body of Christ—the church (compare Matt. 16:18, I Cor. 12, Eph. 5:30, Col. 1:21–24, Rom. 8:9–10). It is a visible body. Why? They, the called and chosen, are members of His flesh. And flesh is seen. There is a body today where the truth of God initially delivered to a chosen servant is still believed and practiced. They are a people who will experience all the crafty

deceptiveness of those who departed from the truth and are motivated and inspired by man's archenemy, Satan himself. The intensity of that deception and tribulation experienced will grow worse and worse. The cause of that hate and animosity will be the divinely inspired—revealed—truth.

It must be understood, when looking for that small body which Christ said would exist today, it will be a group who holds to the doctrines which were first taught by a chosen servant in our time. They will evidence no change—that is, no change on the basis of what that servant first taught, not that which became a part of the progressive insinuation of that which God surely classifies as error. Over the years, under the influence of those who possessed no real or genuine love for that truth, insidious concepts were accepted. This is not unusual. Did not the same happen to ancient Israel? In many cases a departure occurred concept by concept—a little at a time. The same was true in the days of the apostles. A blanket apostasy would not be possible. People would be alerted and therefore resist any such change. Departure must occur insidiously. And that is exactly what happened in these last days.

Faithlessness, the third concept, is a subtle and insidious element. Only the alert and those who genuinely love the original truth will be aware of the progression of error. Most will accept parts of the changes involved. Changes always appeal to some base inclination of the flesh and mind of human beings. For that reason the rationalizations involved will always seem good and acceptable to those human minds.

From the Beginning

The third concept of faithfulness, mentioned above, was considered of such value by God that He doubly emphasized it. John was very clear on the matter. Near the end of his life he wrote: "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life" (I John 2:24–25). And what is life? Christ in us. He, the very Word of God (John 1:1, 14), is life—life eternal. He who does not have Christ in him does not have eternal life, or the hope of it.

What was the truth which the apostles received from the beginning? The word which Christ taught them. The same word which the apostles taught throughout their lives. The word of God which they had come to understand (Luke 24:44–45); the word which they had been commissioned to proclaim (John 17:14, 18; 20:21–22); the word which never changes for it is spirit (John 6:63). Not every person to whom John addressed his first letter had come into the body at the beginning of his preaching. Regardless of when they became a part of

the body, the standard of judgment was that which John, the called and commissioned servant of God, proclaimed from the beginning. If error in any measure had crept into the body, as surely it had—take note of what he said at a later date (II John 9–10, as well as the general intent of all three later epistles)—that error was not to form a basis for future judgment. Only that which had been delivered at the beginning. Therefore, for us, we must predicate our evaluations not on the basis of error which had crept into the body of the church in our day, but that which was first delivered to the chosen and commissioned servant of these last days. What did he teach from the beginning? (That is another issue in its own right).

If we will to continue—remain faithful—in that which was first delivered, we then can be assured that Christ continues in us. He does not change. If He is in us, the evidence of that presence is an unchanging commitment to that doctrine first taught. Whoever the people of God are in these last days, the irrefutable proof is found in the fact they are a people strongly faithful and committed to that way of life which was first taught by the called and commissioned servant of our time. Are there such people extant today? People who strive to obey that which was *first given* to God's chosen? Indeed there are! "The gates of hell cannot prevail against that body" which Christ himself said He would build and that it would continue to the time of His second coming (Matt. 28:19–20; 24:46).

Doctrine Unchanging

The doctrines, beliefs, and practices of anyone are quite observable by others. They are the fruits of the life and vitality of any individual. The manifestations of either the orientation of flesh, or that of the Spirit of God, the Mind of Christ.

There is no real way to mask the intent and purpose of an individual. What he does and believes reveal the intents and purposes of the heart and mind. They are manifestations. That which announces what is occurring in the mind of an individual. "For as he thinketh in his heart so is he" said the wise man, Solomon. Therefore, the fourth concept of faithfulness is loyalty to doctrine—the doctrine first taught (II John 9–10). Herein lies the greatest concern. Why? Because far too many want to hear what others say or, believe they must check out concepts of others. In either case such actions are contrary to plain commands of God. If one *knows* that he has the truth of God, why hear anyone else? Christ never did. If He is living within any one of us, that individual will behave exactly as did Christ. And to emphasize a cardinal point once again, that truth was proclaimed by someone in these last days (Matt. 28:19–20). It is a departure from that revealed way of life which brought about the apostasy. And from that apostasy emerged a host of erroneous concepts—resulting in the establishment of many strange bodies, all claiming to be of God. Some even claiming to hold to the original truth of God while all evidence indicates they

have changed many of the doctrines. Why should anyone who has faith in that which was first delivered give ear to any concepts outside of his faith and conviction? The point is this: There does not exist the kind of faith essential for the inheritance of life and the inheritance of the promises of God in such people. Evidence of a lack of faith is abundant; however, the individual refuses to accept the condition of his mind. By clever deception he is lead to believe he is yet God's chosen and that he is merely doing that which is spiritually required of him.

Must Endure

In many different ways this concept of enduring is emphasized Biblically. Faithlessness is a hallmark of all human beings. They simply will not, or cannot, remain faithful to anything that requires consistency. Stemming, of course, from that internal desire to remain in control. To remain faithful to a principle requires the repression of self—the elevation of principle to a superior consideration. Generally speaking men want nothing to have superiority over the whim of personal will. For that reason, they become gods to themselves. They will bow and dutifully worship at the altar of self—the will of self.

Is it any wonder that Christ said, ". . . he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13). The faithfulness of the called will be tested time and time again. Already, far too many have succumbed to that most demanding slave-driver, the self. We are in bondage to that enemy until freed by accepting Christ. Yet, how easy for anyone to return to the yoke, in a manner that is somewhat akin to what happens to a prisoner who has spent considerable time in restraint. The old shoe is most comfortable. Having been abused by the self for so many years, it seems natural to allow our natures to dominate. And when humans, having once sensed the power and purpose of freedom, are again entangled in the web of carnality, they, strangely, sink to the bottom of the abyss. The Apostle Peter put it this way. "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (II Pet. 2:19–22). Natural restraints are gone. Such people now must go to the depth of their evil natures to feel in control once again.

Proofs of Those Who Heard

There are at least five basic proofs that manifest evidence of one called, who heard the message, and now continue to be faithful. They are: 1) Continuity, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples"; 2) Faithfulness under intense pressure, "evil men shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived . . . But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned"; 3) Consistency, "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end"; 4) Loyalty, "Let that abide in you, which you have heard from the beginning," and finally; 5) Unchanged doctrine, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." These principles are strong manifestations of the divine nature. They reveal the character, perfection, and uncompromising purpose of God and His Son, Jesus Christ. They are totally antithetical to anything that is human, carnal. When found or seen in human beings they are the manifestations of mind transplants. The elimination of the changing mind of man to the unchanging, spiritual, mind of God. They are the manifestations of a powerful and miraculous transformation promised by God. The supernatural power which works within us to produce the ultimate objective—children of God. This is the work of God. Is it possible that any man could have anything to do with the creation of such an object. We exist spiritually as a result of the will of the Father. And since understanding the Word of God is an integral part of becoming a child of God, is it possible that we, as the mere children, could have had a part in bring His plan to pass? Hardly! James wrote, "*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*" (Jas. 1:18). James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit put it simply. We had nothing to do with it. We were called, begotten with the Word of God, and given the opportunity to grow as His children all according to the will of the Father—exclusively. Subsequent to call and conception, the mother (the church) plays an integral part. It is she that carries, nourishes, and protects us until born—at which time we become independent entities. The mother is the church—that body to whom God gave responsibilities. Within that body is a ministry—responsibility established by God (I Cor. 12:18, 28).

In concluding this letter, let us carefully consider the meaningful words of the Apostle Paul when writing to the Thessalonians about the promise of Christ's second coming. He wrote, "So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (II Thes. 1:7–10).

Over the months and years between now and that anticipated event, many trials will be experienced. God is working with those whom He desires to see finish the course in faith and conviction. Can we adhere to that which we were taught? That which was first delivered to us? Will we compromise that way of life and find ourselves rejected? Now is the time for us to fully believe—believe and trust the word which we heard—the spiritual impregnation of life eternal. We do not question the will of the Father. He called us and has begotten us. For that we must be most grateful and appreciative.

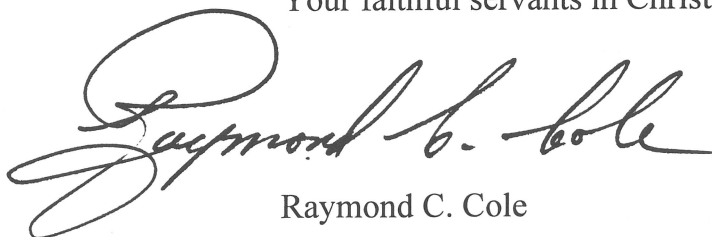
Indeed, there is significant reason for the written Word of God. That will come in due time. But, none of us would understand the depth and meaning of God's will if we did not take the time to explain the matters which have been presented over the past many months. There are yet other things which we must present. Please be patient. Next issue we will consider the matter: "Many Are Purporting to Proclaim the Revealed Way: Can You Know the Faithful?"

We have been called of God. If you can certify the five concepts, principles, mentioned above, you are the children of God. The only factor which remains unanswered at this present time is this: Will we endure unto the end? Are our faith and conviction sufficiently strong? Our hope and prayer is that all will endure.

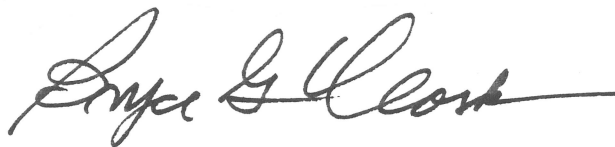
You are the children of God as long as you continue in that which was given to you. May you realize the inheritance which has been promised. Do not turn your backs on those promises as did Esau!

Thanks for this privilege of service. May you be the recipients of all our love and thoughts of kindness.

Your faithful servants in Christ,

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

Raymond C. Cole

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

Bryce G. Clark