

# Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

Greetings from the Philippines.

As usual, life in the Philippines is continuing in a normal trend. Very few, however, are aware that more and more we are passing through deceitful times when truth and falsehood are difficult to discern. We are surrounded by tumultuous voices emanating from all sorts of publications, while the radio and television carry programs which are both religious and secular in nature. In the religious aspect, preaching is found almost everywhere: inside traveling buses, on street corners, marketplaces, and on wider scale in big town plazas and city parks attended by thousands of adherents. As a result of doctrinal changes in the Worldwide Church of God, a number of splinter groups began to find their roots, each one demonstrating its zeal and tenacity to its claim as the true Church of God.

Amidst these present tumultuous times how do we, who are called of God, react? How can we make our calling and election sure, and hold fast to our hope and faith to the end?

In Matthew 24:4-5, Jesus warned: "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and shall deceive many." And in verse 24 deception was to affect even the elect. Can we be empowered to overcome deception? Have we attained a level of spiritual maturity where deceitfulness can no longer affect us?

It is wonderful that at one time we were called, not by any man, but of God. We were drawn to the true Christ, the Son of the living God, and we knew and were confident we followed Him. Whereas before that call, we never knew His laws and His government. Then, we suddenly came to comprehend His voice and obeyed Him. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice . . . and they follow me." Do we still hear His voice? Do we recognize Him among the tumultuous crowd of voices today? Is He still speaking to us as He did when He first called us?

Jesus is certainly speaking to us today. His lone voice in this wilderness of voices is clearly heard by those who have "ears to hear." Yet, His voice is not heard by a deceived world. Indeed many have come in His name claiming they have the truth or are the embodiment of it. Others say they are the body of Christ. Still others claim they alone possess the key to prophecy. In substance they are claiming "they are the Christ." Hence His end time warning, "Be ye not deceived." All these are not His voice.

His words are spoken with a voice of authority so that even the dead shall hear His voice (John 5:25). "They that are of God hear God's words" (John 8:47). "Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice . . ." (John 18:37). "My sheep hear my voice and I know them . . ." (John 10:27). Do we fall within these categories? Indeed we do if we have His Holy Spirit bearing witness with our spirit. Indeed we do if we counted ourselves dead in trespasses and sin and the Spirit of God dwells in us (please read Romans 8:9–17). In other words, we hear His voice through His Spirit by our spirit which hears and recognizes His voice. But we must have a completely surrendered mind.

The highly educated Pharisees of His time did not hear His voice. Instead they reasoned using their carnal minds, judging and deciding what truth is. They rejected revealed knowledge and upheld their traditions and human wisdom. As a result they utterly failed to recognize Him. Peter, on the other hand, accepted divine revelation and readily recognized Christ as the Son of the Living God. Jesus commended Peter as blessed "for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:12). That is how God speaks to those who have "ears to hear."

Today spiritual blindness and deafness can happen to us if we permit the same carnality to dominate us. Man by nature rejects God's voice. In Exodus 20:18–19, Moses brought the Israelites before God so He could speak to them face to face. God even revealed in part His glory by means of thunder and lightning. They all withdrew afar and said, ". . . Speak thou with us and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." That is how human nature reacts to the voice of God. Men neither want God to speak nor do they want to listen to Him.

Paul in his earlier life no doubt heard about Jesus. He rejected His teachings just like the other Pharisees. He had animosity against the church and persecuted the believers, even approving the murder of Stephen. Yet his experience with Christ on the Damascus road changed that orientation to a surrendered life in the Spirit. By that experience and change he later said with authority in Romans 8:5 "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit, the things of the spirit" (NKJV).

To hear God speak to us in these days we need the Spirit of Christ in us. His Spirit gives us the faith to believe that God speaks to us today through His Son. "God who at

various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His son. . ." (Heb. 1:1–2, NKJV). We need faith to hear His voice. Trusting our own minds or the philosophical minds of the world's scholars will surely make us "slow to believe the scriptures." Remember the two travelers on the Emmaus road? (Luke 24:13–31). They did not recognize Jesus as He talked with them. Their "hearts burned within them" while He expounded the Scriptures; it was only when He broke bread and gave thanks that their eyes were opened and they recognized Him. Christ lamented the fact that in spite of His personal presence they were "slow to believe the scriptures." How often do we fail to hear His voice and recognize Him because we, like them, are slow to believe? How often does our Lord speak to us through the breaking of bread at the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread? How often does He speak to us on the Day of Pentecost and the other feast days, yet we fail to hear Him because we lack faith to believe that He speaks to us today?

In Sabbath services and Bible studies when we first believed, we found and heard God speaking to us directly. It did not matter who the speaker was. It did not matter what the message was about. We heard God speaking to us individually. We had ears to hear Him, and we obeyed. Has God stopped speaking to us? Or have we lost the gift of hearing? Or, are we affected by the confusion brought about by so many voices in the world today? Do we want to talk rather than listen? Do we want our voices to be heard among the other voices in the world? In James 1:19 we read, "Wherefore my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak . . ."

It is important that we expect God to speak, and to believe and listen intently as He speaks to us again. For one cannot expect somebody to speak to him when one does not believe and refuses to listen. Believing that God speaks to us at any time is the key to listening to His words. In times like these when deception reigns, God speaks to us as in the past. The fact that in the past we were able to recognize truth from error is the evidence that God spoke to us. The fact that we recognized God's words as distinct from human assertions is evidence that we are of God. Let us have the faith, the belief, that God is speaking to us, and let us keep on listening by our spirit joined with His as we read or listen to His Word.

In closing, another aspect to consider when God speaks to us is how we value His words. How much importance are we giving to what God is saying to us? We listen little to what we value less. Giving the utmost importance to what God is saying to us makes our senses swift to understand, sensitive to His call, and careful to comprehend. Such a priority will make us alert and ready to receive His message. God speaks to us whenever we are individually interested in what He is saying to us. Paul admonishes us to let "the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom. . ." (Col. 3:16).

Let God speak to us in our daily lives in spite of all the various voices that are heard today. May He empower you through His Holy Spirit to have "ears to hear" His voice in these last days.

With much affection,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Corsino C. Canta". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Corsino C. Canta