

# Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren,

The spiritually alert mind must surely be aware that prophesied events of the last days are demanding attention. Though no one is yet capable of putting events and pieces together precisely and accurately, yet their existence is keenly sensed, seen, felt and are mentally troubling. It is in the context of these events that all who are called of God must make life-meaning decisions. Making the right decision can result in life everlasting. But, to make the wrong decisions will be devastating in the day of reality.

Obviously, the called must make many decisions in these last days of trauma and turmoil. Those decisions will be made on the basis of certain particulars. What are those particulars? Knowledge, of course, is imperative. But, when we factor in the fact much knowledge is not foundational, but rather is perverse, the presumption of some individual, or the concepts of a spirit being who is deliberately attempting to influence adversely, the problem of clearly seeing the genuine truth and that which is of God is compounded significantly. For several years I have emphasized and re-emphasized the necessity of laying down an unmoveable, unchanging, basis on which all decisions can be made confidently. Tests and trials are of God. All who live godly lives will be tested and tried. It is the situation out of which character is produced. Therefore, that part will not change. The only part over which we have any power—and even that provided by God—is how we respond to these trials. All of us, individually, must stand not only the test of time, but, also, the ultimate test of our faith and conviction. And please be forewarned there will be, for most of the called at least, a time of ultimate testing. The most sobering part of that test will probably be some other allegiance which we hold and cherish—family, social friendships, even marital relationships (Matthew 10:35–38).

## The Problem

Those who have not diligently and purposefully made that preparation may now be facing the greatest trial of their spiritual lives. Events of the last days have come with a

vengeance. Without the benefit of early preparation some, maybe even several, will make wrong choices. Because one firmly believes and adheres to specific concepts does not necessarily guarantee he, she, or they, are right. The Apostle John was inspired to write of this matter. He said, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. 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 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" (1 John 4:1–6). To confuse the matter even further Satan has introduced an assortment of explanations of "the faith once delivered." Are you going to be able to sort the matter out logically? You must know. Assumption will not suffice. Just keep in mind the following:

1) Satan is going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). You must resist. But how do you resist? (1 Peter 5:9).

2) He is moving freely among the unsuspecting members—members who were called to be part of the One body of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:24–26). Does anyone ever think he, or she, is motivated by Satan or a demon? Hardly! Most, if not all, are sure in their own minds, they possess the Spirit of God and are speaking from a spiritual premise. Yet, clearly, some are absolutely influenced and motivated by Satan. At the same time we must remember the true servant of God is diligently attempting to persuade and keep on track the children of God. "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (2 Timothy 2:24–26). How will that servant be viewed who resists the influences of Satan?

3) The Apostle Paul instructs the Ephesian church how to resist Satan and to be victorious in this life-threatening test. He writes:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak (Ephesians 6:10–20).

Instruction which is just as imperative today as it was in Paul's day. Add to Paul's instruction the statements of the Apostle John in 1 John 1:1–7 and 1 John 2:1–29. Please reread the statements of John and make sure you understand them thoroughly. If that which you initially held dear is the same as you now believe and practice you can live confidently. When God reveals His way, He does so in the beginning. This concept in no way stands in opposition to growth.

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures,

unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen (2 Peter 3:8–18).

The called are to be both steadfast and grow. The only way such instruction is possible is as follows. The old must not be changed. But new knowledge will be added. Interestingly, that is precisely the definition of the Greek word used for "grow." It means, "add thereto."

### **Back To the Apostasy**

The beginning of the apostasy was in the latter sixties and the early to mid-seventies. Major and wholesale changes to the doctrine were effected. The consequences of those changes were devastating. Calling to mind earlier experiences I had had with Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, I knew revelation could not change. This concept was driven home to me in my first years at Ambassador College. Regarding the matter of Passover—the day on which it was to be observed—I had been compelled to accept by faith the fact the truth of the matter was revealed to him. Once accepting that fact, I knew no change could be allowed. Therefore, when many ministers began to emphasize the concept, "what you can technically prove once can be proved again," I knew the foundation was faulty. I could not, and would not, accept that premise. Even in those troubling days, there were peers of mine who knew I would not change. This resulted in a Sabbatic leave and my departure from Pasadena. My family and I moved back to Oregon where I had grown from childhood to adulthood. We moved to a small community, Coquille, Oregon, along the mid-coast. While living there I was frequently flown back to Pasadena to attend meetings arranged for the purpose of challenging and reviewing every major, and some more minor, doctrines which the church had held sacrosanct since my induction into the body. Despite these changes, my mind and heart could not forget the precious instruction received earlier—that the truth of God had been given to Mr. Armstrong by revelation. I would not accept the changes. By careful study I had come to the conclusion that the apostasy of 2 Thessalonians was occurring, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thessalonians 2:1–3). Please take note: The expression "falling away" (v3) in the Greek is "apostasy." That means the



body had departed from the truth. You will further note that the events which commenced in the 1960's and 70's would continue to the second coming of Christ (vv 3-12).

Once the apostasy had commenced, many members had become greatly troubled. What was happening to the church which they once believed and knew to be the body of truth? The calls came from around the world. Not having a complete, exhaustive answer to the many questions which I was being asked, I began an in-depth study of conditions of the last days. What I discovered startled me. Thankfully, what I had studied and absorbed from God's Word made it possible for me to answer questions and help troubled sheep to understand. Soon a significant number of members in Eugene and Portland were asking to be taught on a weekly basis.

### **My Quandary**

Through the intense study of the mid-seventies I had encountered texts which clearly forbid anyone from assuming he has a right to commence "a work." The only legitimate endeavor is that one which is sanctioned and approved of God. It is God's Work, not the work of any man. I knew that I did not dare establish any activity which was not authorized by God. Though I was answering questions and having casual Bible studies in specific members' homes. I still would not formalize any activity. Still many members wanted to meet on a weekly basis. What was I to do? I did not want to presume anything. On the other hand, I did not want to be a hireling.

### **The Test**

After several appeals by specific members to establish weekly studies and much praying and studying on my part, I felt I had no alternative but to place the dilemma before God. Without informing anyone, so the test would be legitimate, I, in prayer, told God, "I am willing to teach and help your people if you will let me know such an activity is approved by you." The fleece was laid out. If God sent a significant number of people from Portland and Eugene to our home in Coquille for the next Sabbath, I would take that as a sign He approved and would grant us His blessing. I was amazed. We had a house full. What a joyous occasion that was! Soon arrangements were made to have weekly Sabbath studies in Eugene. Soon thereafter arrangements were made to have meetings in Portland. God continued to bless. Because of calls from around the country there were people from far and wide seeking help. Some from scattered areas, others from areas where later small groups formed. We were forced to commence a tape program. That program continues to this very day. It has grown significantly.

## What Would Our Doctrinal Standard Be?

Through intense study, it became very obvious God had established a basis for doctrinal evaluation—a basis valid for any time and for any person. Since I was the only one involved in the study—effort to ascertain what action must be taken—the Biblical instructions were highly personalized. For instance, Paul wrote to Titus, "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; *Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught*, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:7–9). I knew very well what Mr. Armstrong taught. And as I stated earlier, there were a couple of areas I had to accept in faith. The result of a two-year struggle to understand lead to an implicit acceptance by faith (Jude 3). The standard was now complete. What I had been taught and accepted by faith was absolute. That must be the premise of any activity undertaken. What was equally obvious, since so many major and minor changes had already occurred in the church, some point of reference had to be established. Would that point or time of reference be that which Mr. Armstrong taught just before the massive changes of 1972–74? That did not make sense for such a conclusion would have rendered the earlier changes—healing, land Sabbath, others—acceptable. Other concepts had been analyzed and found wanting. Considering the fact that the unchanging doctrine (truths and ways of God) were those given to the chosen servants of God—Moses, prophets, Christ, the twelve apostles, and the Apostle Paul—the only acceptable premise of future evaluation had to be that which was *first* given to Mr. Armstrong. The first concepts of doctrine he approved and taught. (Please remember there were several concepts that changed over the weeks and months. They were approved and then unapproved.) For that reason I have over the years emphasized that the faith once delivered could only be that which he first approved. This in no way allowed for changes initiated by college students, doctrinal committees, or to other groups presumably authorized to review doctrine. Therefore, from the beginning of Church of God, The Eternal, I have strongly emphasized the fact foundational doctrine could be only that which was first approved and taught by Mr. Armstrong. Contentions which have arisen over social or holiday issues will be covered independently, at a different time. When given they will be covered from the premise of what I heard and taught despite the reluctance of some who are now claiming that any such proclamation must be substantiated by at least two witnesses. If such were Biblically true every prophet of God should have been rejected, Christ Himself should not have been believed, and the Apostle Paul should not have been accepted. Man's problem is that he does not carry his logic through to a final conclusion. Based on concepts which I have heard recently, we are forced to ask, did we make a colossal mistake in not accepting the changes in both doctrines of Pentecost and divorce and remarriage. This, of

course, would have been true of other doctrines which followed the two critical changes of the early seventies. A standard of judgment, evaluation, to be valuable and useful, must be unalterable.

Another way by which much confusion has been generated is the willful tendency to categorize judgments as doctrine. By this practice, concepts, even decisions can be given an unwarranted emphasis. For example, the statement, "the doctrines of Pentecost, Passover, makeup, and Mother's Day." The inclusion of "makeup" in such a list, gives it a stature of significance which is totally incorrect. And, at the same time, including the idea of Mother's Day in such a list gives it a value totally unwarranted. Mother's Day as a concept *is not* doctrine. At best, it is a tradition and/or custom borrowed from the past which is being idolized to the extent an attempt is made to make it equal in significance to Pentecost and other doctrines of major value to God and the called of God. When Mr. Armstrong made a thunderous and emphatic statement about Mother's Day and Father's Day in 1972 or 1973, (at a Sabbath service which was held in the Pasadena Civic Auditorium) he was not addressing it as doctrine. It was a judgment, a decision on his part. He branded them both as pagan and unacceptable as occasions to be honored by members of God's church. It was only a short while later he rescinded his comment about Mother's Day but held to his original conviction about Father's Day. Why he changed his mind in that brief time was never explained. I suspect, however, the change stemmed from the same liberalization which was evilly affecting the church in many other ways at that point in time. Even so, the standard by which to determine doctrine contained in "the faith once delivered" was still applicable. He first declared its pagan origin and unfitness to be observed by members of the church. Any attempt to justify Mother's Day and/or Father's Day while at the same time refusing to change regarding Pentecost and divorce and remarriage makes someone a hypocrite. Mr. Armstrong also approved the change of Pentecost and the relaxation of the standard for evaluating divorce cases. On the other hand to make his initial approval the only valid one makes the matter consistent and logical. Though led initially by the Holy Spirit, Mr. H. W. Armstrong as well as other servants—those mentioned in the Bible—could be induced to change and/or compromise the revealed truth. It was the only premise which made sense to me in 1974 and was the foundational premise used in establishing Church of God, The Eternal in January–February, 1975.

### **What is Doctrine?**

This concept needs more space than that which remains within the limits of this letter. It will be covered later.

## The Separation

On Sunday, November 15, 1998, Mr. Bryce Clark came to the office with a proposal of resignation. He wanted to know if my convictions were firm regarding social issues—such as makeup, and national holidays—such as Mother's Day and Father's Day. I told him I was even more firm because of my promise to God at the time of departure from Worldwide. I did not and do not intend to compromise the truths and ways which I had heard from Mr. Armstrong and had preached since 1951. He, then, tendered his conditions for an amicable separation. In essence the agreement was this: No public diatribes, no aggressive attempts to contact or abuse those in the church, and certain financial considerations. I accepted the agreement since his offer seemed to indicate that he did not intend to change his orientation. It is self-evident that two cannot walk together unless they agree with each other. I do not intend to sink to the level of personalized slander despite the maze of lying hypocrisy and inferential treatment to which I have been subjected. God knows the truth and will make the final judgment. I have confidence in Him. This condition places an extra heavy burden upon the sheep—you, the members of the body. The decision you make could be very costly. Just remember the warnings of the Bible. This in all probability is just one of the several decisions you will be required to make. Only those who endure to the end will find salvation (Matthew 24:13).

## Your Part

There is significant information given biblically by which you can conduct your lives in this time of trauma. You need to read, take judicious note of and, then, act on these instructions.

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith. But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ. Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed (2 Thessalonians 3:1–7, 13–14).

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. 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 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 (1 John 4:1–6).

I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. 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. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 4–11).

The summary of your responsibility is found in 2 Peter 3:8–12, we read:

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on

fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?  
(2 Peter 3:8–12).

May God Almighty and His kind and merciful Son help us all to make the right decision and to hold firmly the truths which we first believed. My prayers and thoughts are always with and for you.

With deep love and affection to all,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "R" and "C".

Raymond C. Cole