

Church of God, The Eternal

P. O. Box 775
Eugene, Oregon 97440
www.cogeternal.org

The late Raymond C. Cole
Founding Pastor
Jon W. Brisby
Pastor, Director

Offices in:
United States
Philippines
Switzerland

February 2002

Dear Brethren:

One of the greatest deceptions which has ever been foisted upon human beings is the false conception of truth—its origin, its basis, and its definition. From the very beginning, Satan the devil—in the form of a serpent—attacked Adam and Eve most effectively by creating doubt in their minds about the source and definition of real Truth. God is the author of Truth. Truth emanates from Him alone. "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a *God of truth* and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4) [emphasis ours]. Yet the serpent convinced Eve, as well as Adam, to reject this very simple tenet.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Genesis 3:1–6).

There are a number of very significant concepts highlighted in these six verses. First, the deceiver began by calling into question that which should never have been doubted. God was a perfect Being, and incapable of falsehood. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19). It is very clear that Eve understood what God had commanded. She repeated God's instructions with explicit accuracy. Yet Satan was successful in causing her to doubt her Creator, and to believe a lie. What was that lie? "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:" (Genesis

3:4). This statement was an outright falsehood! But how was Satan able to convince Eve to accept him as the source of real Truth and believe God was the deceiver? Here we find subtlety employed to distract her from the blatancy of his lie. He did not simply tell the lie and then leave it there to stand by itself. No, he immediately followed the lie with a statement of truth, intended to make the lie appear to be part of a credible package. "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). This statement was true. If Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, God had provided that their eyes would be opened, and they would understand things not yet revealed. This was borne out by the result of their actions. "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked . . ." (Genesis 3:7). But that point of truth had nothing to do with God's command not to touch the tree! One had no bearing on the veracity of the other. Gaining new knowledge by eating the fruit had nothing to do with avoiding the death penalty for disobedience. Satan had used deception—similar to a parlor trick employing slight of hand—to camouflage his lie within an explanation based upon truth.

Man Values, Yet Rejects Real Truth

From that time forward, the concept of truth has been elusive to human beings. Having rejected the source of all Truth—God the Creator—man became cut off from true understanding and was left to grope in the darkness for nearly six thousand years, doing that which seems right in his own mind—that which seems *to him* to be true. "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts" (Proverbs 21:2). And what is the nature of that heart of man which God created; manifested in all human beings who draw breath on this earth? "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Man is inherently deceitful—devoid of truth—seeking to justify his own whims as that of righteousness. But the prophet Isaiah made very plain the real substance of man's own righteousness. "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isaiah 64:6). Man's descent into deception began by the initial rejection of Truth, the priceless gift offered by our Creator. Since then, humanity as a whole has been cut off from all real Truth.

But God created man to value the principle of truth, so even though he cannot find it on his own—because of his alienation from God—he erroneously denies this fact and pursues his own conception of that truth. Man also inherently values love, peace, joy, and every other good thing in God's perfect character. This fact is what leads most to conclude human nature is actually good down deep inside, because we by nature desire honorable things and attach ourselves to lofty principles. But the reality is, God made us with the *desire* for His good things, but totally void of the *power* to achieve them on our own. Man was created incomplete in the flesh. It requires the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit

to make us whole. "Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:17). It is this Spirit of Truth that David recognized as the vital ingredient. "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit" (Psalms 51:10–12). With that power of God, and a legitimate closeness with Him, we have the opportunity to understand real Truth and overcome the natural pulls of the flesh which seek to drag us down. Without that power, we are left with the *desire* for the fruits of God's way of life, but with absolutely no capacity to achieve it.

Man's Futility Without God's Truth

Is it any wonder that man, for all his ability and good intentions, has never been able to find real contentment and peace of mind? The history of mankind is one of great physical accomplishments, but completely void of satisfaction of his most burning spiritual needs. How well Solomon described the futility of man's endeavors, absent the knowledge of his true created purpose:

And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow (Ecclesiastes 1:13–18).

Such is the state of man, devoid of a true relationship with his Maker. For all the knowledge amassed and the advancement of his sciences and technologies, in the end he is void of any real satisfaction; futile and empty.

But ironically, part of man's exile from God includes his lack of this very fundamental understanding. Man believes that he controls his own destiny and can ultimately achieve—on his own—everything that will bring true satisfaction. This is a continuation of the very same lie that Adam and Eve accepted at the mouth of the serpent. But in spite of all the grandiose claims about the great human potential—humanism—the actual fruits have been those recorded by the Apostle Paul in prophecy for the last days:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, *Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth* (2 Timothy 3:1–7) [emphasis ours].

God prophesied through Daniel the advancement of knowledge upon the earth. "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (Daniel 12:4). Yes, knowledge was to be increased, and so it has been, but not *truth*! Knowledge which comes from the endeavors of men never generates understanding of spiritual truth. God intentionally has hidden that understanding from man as a penalty for his rebellion. "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Corinthians 1:19–20). Yet man continues ever confident in his own abilities to solve the problems of this world. The nations seek to establish their own perfect society, based upon Godly principles of love, peace, joy, and goodness. All the while they are totally ignorant of their own profound deception and lack of capacity to accomplish anything of lasting value. "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Even though they are still unwilling to admit it, the very fruits of their endeavors over all these millennia have been only strife, wars, sorrows, and every imaginable evil.

But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work (James 3:14–16).

Why does man continue to believe erroneously in his own capacity to master truth? Because Satan is still telling that same lie he has from the beginning, and human beings are still buying-in to the great hoax.

Truth Plus Error Equals Error

Remember the method Satan used to make his lie look legitimate to Eve? He wrapped that lie within a statement of truth, giving the appearance that the entire package was true.

But here is the critical principle God's people need to recognize: Truth is only truth if it is wholly and completely pure, without any error. If there is the introduction of even the smallest falsehood, it makes the entire product corrupt. "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Galatians 5:7–9). Adding a little truth to a lie never improves the overall product. And likewise, adding a little lie to the truth always makes the whole product completely false. Error is a contaminant. Any exposure corrupts the entire product. This is why God used leavening as a depiction of sin. "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8). Truth is that which is pure. It is compared to unleavened bread—that which contains absolutely no leavening! Anything else is error through and through. God created Truth, and that product contains no impurities of any kind. "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever" (Psalms 12:6–7).

But men have decided that a mixture of truth and error still offers some value, even if it is not perfect. Satan understands this tendency and has used it masterfully as a key in his deceptive success. "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, *which deceiveth the whole world*: ..." (Revelation 12:9) [emphasis ours]. Many human beings have been conditioned to accept that we can never really have *pure truth*, so they stop trying. Truth has become relative to time and circumstances. What is true today might not be true tomorrow. Situation ethics is considered more valuable than the pursuit of elusive absolutes. Pontius Pilate depicted this orientation very well in his encounter with Jesus Christ.

Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. 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. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? . . . (John 18:37–38) [emphasis ours].

Here we see the marked distinction in orientation between God and men. Jesus Christ was speaking about Truth as an absolute—that which was pure, reliable, unchangeable, inviolable, and attainable by God's chosen. Pilate viewed such a concept of absolutes as ludicrous. His flippant retort, "What is truth," summarizes the natural human philosophy, denying the possibility of ever really knowing pure truth. Unfortunately, our adversary has capitalized on this human rationalistic proclivity, and even successfully deceived many of God's own people, who should know better.

Did Christ Reveal Truth or Error?

One would think that even though the world has been deceived into accepting a false concept about the subject of truth, surely those whom God has called out of this world would understand. Did not we receive *the truth*?

At that time Jesus answered and 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 (Matthew 11:25–27).

Whoever it was who received this special calling—those to whom God revealed Himself—they were the recipients of . . . what? Was He truth, error, or some combination of the two? Is Jesus Christ the personification of a mixture of truth and error? Or was He the perfect portrayal of singular Truth? Yes, that is precisely what He was!

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and *in him is no darkness at all*. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: (1 John 1:1–6) [emphasis ours].

Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every *perfect gift* is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is *no variableness, neither shadow of turning*. Of his own will begat he us with *the word of truth*, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures (James 1:16–18) [emphasis ours].

If there is no darkness within Jesus Christ—and by His revelation of that *perfect gift* to those called to be part of His Body, the Church, He begat us with the *word of truth*—can there be any doubt that a true Christian is the recipient of unadulterated Truth, without contamination of error? Yet the majority of God's people in the last days have turned to reject this very fundamental principle! Many claim today that Herbert Armstrong "figured out" his teachings from personal Bible study, and that he got some things right, but other

things wrong. They believe that it is their personal prerogative (under the mantra "prove all things") to separate the truth from the error, and continue to "grow in grace and knowledge." But when we dig down and examine this ideology in its raw form, we find this was precisely the orientation of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve forgot that God revealed unadulterated Truth to them! No, God did not reveal *all* truth to them. He gave them what they needed to know. But what He gave them was perfect and uncorrupted. He gave them something that could not be improved upon. So to, if we were ever the true Church of God in the last days, then *we also* received Truth by divine revelation, just as God has *always* given in any age in which He has performed a work. But many of God's wayward children today have come to accept the same old lie of Satan; that truth is ours to discover on our own, according to our inherent human capabilities. But what have been the fruits of that orientation within God's church?

Doctrinal a la Carte

With hundreds of groups having splintered from our parent body over the last quarter century, there is now a selection of almost any brand of doctrine to meet one's personal preference. And if none of those existing groups meets one's taste, it is fashionable to start one's own group and presume authority to teach in the name of Jesus Christ, or else to disavow all organized religion and engage in a loose affiliation with other "living room church of god" advocates. Once having accepted the lie that Jesus Christ did not really reveal Himself—unadulterated Truth—to us by the preaching of a chosen servant in these last days, most members of God's Church have cast off the yoke and decided they will determine real truth for themselves. After the ministry showed they were fallible—through mistakes of administrative practice and the presumption of prophetic capabilities—the majority of members leapt to the conclusion that the original *doctrine* was also derived from human wisdom, and not divine revelation. Yet, if that is true, it simply means God was never involved in the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong and the Radio Church of God any more than He was involved in any other religious movement of this world claiming to be Christian.

Brethren, we cannot have it both ways. We cannot claim Herbert Armstrong was uninspired by Jesus Christ and never received legitimate Truth, and still believe that parent organization was ever God's Church. If it *was* God's Church, it was so because it received Truth—pure and uncorrupted—as the very personification of Jesus Christ. But if Christ was not really the foundation of that parent body from the beginning, then we are all fooling ourselves. You cannot take something that is a fraud from the beginning, and tweak it through doctrinal changes here and there to create Truth. Remember, adding some truth to a premise of falsehood never produces a pure product. But if the Radio Church of God was the work of God in this age, then it was so because Christ was the Revelator of Truth, even as He was to Adam and Eve at the beginning. And if Christ truly revealed Himself through the ministry of Herbert Armstrong, what He gave was pure and unadulterated, and is to be accepted as Truth, regardless of assertions of self-proclaimed human scholars.

What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant (1 Corinthians 14:36–38).

Yes, the Apostle Paul received unadulterated Truth from Jesus Christ through divine revelation. Those who were contending with Paul about doctrine were pursuing the very same deceptive course that ensnared Adam and Eve. But Paul made it very plain he was not about to compromise what he knew to be divinely inspired, no matter how accomplished, clever, or renowned the opposing scholars were. Herbert Armstrong acknowledged also he had received those same doctrines Paul had, and through the same revelatory instruction of Jesus Christ.

And so I say to you, as the Apostle Paul said to those at Galatia: I certify you, brethren, that the GOSPEL which is preached of me is not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it but BY THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST. . . . When it pleased God, who . . . called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him to the world; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood—neither went I to any sect or denomination or human theologian, but I went directly to the WORD of GOD, on my knees, corrected, reproved, and instructed in God's righteousness and TRUTH!—Herbert W. Armstrong, Co-worker Letter; November 29, 1954.

Either decide we believe this assertion was true, and the original teachings of the Radio Church of God were divinely inspired by Jesus Christ, or else decide it is not true, and that Christ had no part in it at all. But do not think you will ever take a "middle road"—admitting Mr. Armstrong was a servant of God, but believing he was wrong on certain original doctrines—and have any hope of avoiding Satan's deception. God is never the author of a mixture of truth and error. Truth plus error equals error—always—and is never reflective of the work of the living God.

God's Church Possesses Truth

For those who have embraced the philosophy of Pontius Pilate, and believe we cannot really know the whole truth within God's Church today, they should take note of God's inspired statements to the contrary:

Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might

keep thy word. I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way . . . Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psalms 119:98–105).

But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because *ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth*. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also (1 John 2:20–23) [emphasis ours].

Anyone who claims God has left us in confusion, without the means to know the real truth on many doctrinal points, unknowingly is denying the Revelator and using the spirit of antichrist. Whomever God deals with as His chosen people will be the recipients of Truth, and that truth is a lamp unto their feet. Those who claim we cannot really know the truth and must each just do the best we can with what we know, are simply admitting God's Spirit is not really their guide. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will *guide you into all truth*: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come" (John 16:13) [emphasis ours]. And what about those who admit we should know the truth, but espouse something different than what we first heard?

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 (1 John 2:24).

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8).

And how did God's people receive that Truth from the beginning? Was it through our own individual Bible study, or did we hear the voice of a chosen servant, and then use our Bibles to *confirm* that which we were taught through a minister of Jesus Christ? "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). Like it or not, God has always used a human servant to speak in His name and by His authority, and that is still how He has chosen to work today. All the anti-government postulations by God's apostate people aside, rejection of the human voice Jesus Christ chose to use is rejection of the Son and the Father. "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying,

they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me" (John 15:20–21).

Is That Truth Still Preached Today?

There are yet those who will pay homage to the authority of Mr. Armstrong as the servant of God, but will claim we have been left without a faithful ministry to teach us today. They resist the reality that Christ promised to be manifested through a chosen ministry until His Second Coming (Matthew 28:20, 24:45–46), preferring instead to pursue a relationship with Jesus Christ "on their own." These sit at home (or attend sporadically with many different groups), subscribing to a number of publications and sermon tape programs, believing with all their hearts they are OK in the eyes of God. They do not believe there is any ministry left today proclaiming the unadulterated Truth of God. They believe instead that many of the splinter groups that came out of the Worldwide Church of God each have "a little bit of truth." It is therefore their role to listen and read all of these "mixtures" of truth and error, and then harvest the nuggets of truth they find. They frequently quote Mr. Armstrong's statement, "Don't believe me, believe your Bible," and 1 Thessalonians 5:21, "Prove all things," as justification for this approach.

Is this really what God intends for His people today? Is that how the Body of Christ is to be fed spiritually in these last days? Is it true we have been left without a ministry speaking "the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" by the authority of Jesus Christ? Or is this merely another means to shed the bonds of restrictions, as human beings are ever want to do?

If we believe the ministers in these various splinter groups teach some truth (from God's Holy Spirit) and yet at the same time some error (from their own personal thinking), what does that say about our view of Christ and His Truth? Have we not already seen that the fruit of God's Holy Spirit is unadulterated Truth? A mixture of truth and error is never the signature of God, or any endeavor in which He is party. But a mixture of truth and error is absolutely a signature of Satan the devil, as we have already seen! Satan also knows and believes the Truth. "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). But Satan is a deceiver, and uses a little truth as a conduit to introduce his perversion. But if we, as such "capable and discerning" members of the church, are truly commissioned by God to sit at home and prove all things, sifting out the truth from the error in all we hear, why not invite Satan as well to be one of our contributors? He espouses a mixture of truth and error like the others, so maybe we can glean some value from Satan by picking out the truth from his mixed message. If that seems preposterous, as it should, how can we any more justify listening to anyone else who offers less than the whole truth? We can also pick out certain nuggets of truth from any mainstream "Christian" church. So why not watch Protestant television evangelism programs, and

subscribe to Trinitarian missionary publications? Or perhaps this philosophy of sifting truth from error breaks down when taken to its logical conclusion.

Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). The "living room church of god" advocates twist this to give themselves perpetual authority to challenge any statement by a minister with whom they do not personally agree. Seeing themselves as the ultimate standard of evaluation, they measure each statement, accepting that with which they agree, and rejecting that which they have determined by their own standard is not "truth." This sounds a lot like what Adam and Eve did, selectively creating their own concept of truth from the input of multiple influences. But since we already know the end result for Adam and Eve—as they cut themselves off from real truth—there must be a flaw in this reasoning.

The answer lies in the very principles we have been examining. The Apostle Paul was not saying he was espousing a mixture of Truth and error (as Satan does), and that the church was to sift through all of his words to glean only the nuggets of truth. Not at all! He was asserting that he *was* a faithful servant, and that because he was following Christ—with truth, and nothing but the truth—that the flock of Jesus Christ should follow him! "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 4:6). Those are strong, blunt words, but they are true.

Those who seek to protect their personal rights to be the final judge of truth, often quote 1 Corinthians 11:1 as their exception clause, but never quote other passages where Paul used no such clauses. "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus *I have begotten you* through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, *be ye followers of me*" (1 Corinthians 4:15–16) [emphasis ours]. Here, Paul did not qualify this assertion with the clause, "as I follow Christ." Why? Because he was asserting that he *was* being a faithful servant, speaking *only Truth* through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and therefore the church should follow him—period! Does this mean he was advocating they should follow him even if he began to change doctrine and speak something different? Absolutely not! We already quoted Galatians, chapter one, but let us read it again:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8).

What was the standard of legitimate Truth? That which had *first* been preached through a chosen servant of God. And because that original teaching came as revelation from Jesus Christ, it was Truth, and could never change. Therefore, not even that very servant had the authority to change, no matter what his office within the church. Paul told the congregations they should be teachable, and follow him, because he had proven by his

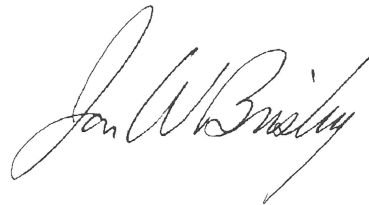
fruits he was a faithful servant. He was not speaking truth in one statement through the Holy Spirit, and then error in the next out of his own heart. Jesus Christ provided the explanation of this principle in the wake of accusations by the Pharisees.

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things (Matthew 12:33–35).

Jesus Christ promised that there would be a faithful ministry speaking by authority in His name, even until His Second Coming. Those servants, whoever and wherever they are, will not be speaking a mixture of Truth and error, as Satan and human beings do. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they will be "good trees" and bearing consistent fruit that can be counted on to be pure. But what if one of those good trees should become poisoned and go bad? Following and being teachable should not make us vulnerable to deception in that event. Why? Because the standard is that which was taught from the beginning, and if we ever find a servant who has had good fruits, but suddenly begins to *change* from what was first taught, that would be the signal that we are no longer to follow. But those who refuse to follow anyone—claiming either there is no faithful ministry left to follow, or else that God doesn't require them to follow any minister to begin with—are deceiving themselves, and have fallen for the very same lie that Satan pawned-off on humanity in the Garden of Eden.

Brethren, God *is* the source and personification of Truth. That same God revealed Himself—unadulterated Truth—to the church through a chosen ministry. Satan and mankind are those who personify a mixture of truth and error. Any truth that contains such error is never of God. If we understand these principles and take them to heart, we can avoid the trap of deception that has plagued humankind from the beginning. God mercifully has provided the means for our spiritual success. If we are among those whom He has called out of this world, we need not be duped into believing a lie. How priceless is the simplicity of Christ. May you each have the conviction to hear and hold fast to those words of life we received as the Body of Christ so many years ago in this age.

In love from your humble servant,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial "J" and a stylized "B".

Jon W. Brisby