

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

I can remember back when my family first began to listen to the World Tomorrow broadcast. They first started listening to Mr. Armstrong near the middle of the year 1957. I was about ten years old. Rather young, but I can remember how the broadcast affected my father because he had been searching for someone who was preaching about that which he was beginning to ask questions. He would sit by the old battery radio for long periods of time trying to find a minister to whom he could listen. After finding Mr. Armstrong on a seven o'clock evening program each Sunday, his searching ceased. He knew he had finally found someone teaching the truth. There were no local congregations in our area so my father would read often to us children all the articles that he had begun receiving from Radio Church of God in Pasadena. We immediately began to observe the Sabbath day and without a church to attend we learned from the articles. My father also would read often from the Proverbs, Psalms, and teachings of Christ about the end time. As a young lad, the teachings made sense to me and I do not ever remember doubting any of the doctrines about which we were learning. When he taught us about Christmas and the other pagan holidays, I believed it. I know that the truth is spiritual and I could not have understood beyond the physical but I did grasp a lot of the physical facts.

My parents attended the Spring Holy Days in Birmingham, Alabama, and the Feast of Tabernacles in Big Sandy, Texas. We children did not get to go to the Feast in Big Sandy until 1960. Finally, we heard of a weekly Bible study that was in Atlanta, Georgia. It must have been around 1961. We started attending along with a couple of men we had met in our area. Driving from Asheville, North Carolina, to Atlanta, Georgia, was well over two hundred miles but we made it every week with few exceptions and that was usually in bad weather. We would get home each time around two o'clock on Sunday morning. Eventually a church was established in Greensboro, North Carolina. That was still around two hundred miles away but God provided the way for us to attend regularly even though we were of very limited means. Around 1963 we were able to have our own local church in Asheville, North Carolina.

Being an impressionable young lad all those years, I observed many things about God's people. Speaking of almost all of them, they were very excited and inspired about being able to get together and share one another's friendship and experiences and to observe God's Sabbath and Holy Days with that kind of fellowship. In those years we heard of numerous miraculous things that happened. One I remember vividly was of a young baby being thrown from a car at the speed of sixty miles an hour. He was about a year old and was wrapped in a blanket. The baby went skidding right down the highway and was not hurt. I also remember a family with a carload of people that skidded on a slick road and went down a bank on the way to church. The car was badly damaged but no one was hurt and they were able to catch a ride and go on to church that Sabbath. In my case, I was struck with appendicitis one Friday at the age of sixteen. The pain was excruciating. I could not move in any way to help the pain. I was anointed that evening but the pain was so bad the next morning that I went to church hoping that would help. During the hymns I turned white and almost passed out, but when I started to go home the pain left completely and to my knowledge I have never had a pain in that area since. I also remember when living in Texas in 1969, my wife was in labor with my first son. After three days he was not being born and his mother was getting very fatigued. Being new to natural childbirth, we became very concerned and called for her to be anointed. The midwife was tired and worried. I was watching from the window as the minister was leaving the driveway after my wife was anointed, and the midwife said the baby is here. I looked around and she was unwrapping the cord from the baby's neck, as it was around the neck twice.

God does not want us to forget all the blessings that he has bestowed upon us or to ever take them for granted. He wants us to remember and to learn from the lessons of life. As human beings we are no different than ancient Israel. Every one of us can and should learn from past mistakes as well as remember all that we have been given as the people of God. After all the miraculous deeds that God did for Israel in delivering them from slavery and all the trials and tests through which they were put while living in Egypt—to have been brought out of all that and given their freedom—they turned from the truth given them. They forgot so soon and were not thankful, so that God had to speak through Moses to them, "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee" (Deuteronomy 32:7). In verse 5, they had corrupted themselves and had become a perverse and crooked generation. In verse 15, it says they forsook God and in verse 20 it says that they were a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.

We should always remember all the great blessings that we have been afforded and draw energy from all the positive things of the past as well as the present and receive inspiration from those blessings to help carry us through the trials we face. If you are too young to have seen those great blessings of the past, maybe it would be of help to talk to some of our older members who are eyewitnesses of God delivering a people out of bondage

and slavery in this end time as well. That bondage of slavery was to our human natures, society, and the system of Babylon. We were delivered, but are we still thankful for that? Are we truly thankful that God gave us his dedicated servant—Mr. Raymond Cole—during and following the time of the apostasy, and following that, to help us stay with His revealed truth? And also presently, He has given us a truly dedicated minister in whom I know God is working, to continue teaching us that inspired way of life.

If we focus on our future—those awesome promises to which we have looked forward for so long—and if we allow our thoughts through God's Holy Spirit to inspire us, then we will not get bogged-down in the mundane drudgery that this life seems to bring our way. There are many blessings that we have been given just by having the knowledge of that true way of life. What would I be doing now if I had never been given the knowledge of the truth? There are numerous blessings just for understanding and striving to live God's revealed truth. We do not have to rely on this worldly system and put trust in it for our health and well-being, nor for our protection and livelihood. Our trust should be in God, the Supreme Being of this whole universe, and He will guide and take care of us through whatever means. Being human, it is easy to want to dwell on the physical at times when we should dwell more on the spiritual. Our physical existence, as we know, will be put off one day if we are among those blessed to take part in the first resurrection. This physical life will be put off just like the chaff from the wheat. Once the wheat (fruit) is born then the chaff is of no use to the wheat anymore. Much like a husk on an ear of corn, the husk is taken off so the fruit or corn can be used. In like manner, if we qualify to enter into God's Kingdom, these physical lives and bodies will be put off for that glorious spiritual fruit that can be born through our Savior Jesus Christ.

We have too much time invested to get lax now and let this world and the pursuit of physical happiness take the place of true spiritual fellowship, peace, and lasting joy we receive from being dedicated to that true way of life. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:19–21). If we place a lot of confidence in this world's system of trying to build security for ourselves, then we are destined to be greatly disappointed in the future. The real future is in that revealed way of life in which we have been so wonderfully blessed. Matthew 6:31–34 is a familiar scripture but we need to read it and reflect on it often because we cannot feel secure apart from accepting that way and then living it. "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

We need to keep our eyes on God's law which is eternal. "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7). In Romans 7:12 the Apostle Paul stated, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." In verse 14 he states further that we know the law is spiritual. In the last part of verse 7 of Psalm 111 it states, "The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness" (Psalm 111:7-8). We can have real peace if we can really trust God to sustain us in this life. Nahum 1:7 says, "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." God is our provider. In Matthew 6:30 Christ says, "Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

God wants us to live that way of life and step out and do those things that take faith. Just like the principle of tithing, it takes faith to trust that God will provide. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10). God challenges us to obey and to prove that He will greatly bless us for obedience. If we are actively living those principles outlined in the Bible, then we know and are experiencing many wonderful blessings, spiritually and even physically. When we come before God on His holy Sabbath days and annual feast days, then we know that we can be inspired to rejoice and show compassion, kindness and love toward our brethren. We have much about which to rejoice. We need to reflect all the way back to our calling and the great blessing of receiving so much of God's mercy and all the ways that He has wonderfully blessed each of us. "And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). We must go on and allow God to fulfill His will in our lives. He wants us to grow in mercy toward others as Christ was merciful to us and we also need the knowledge of how to use that mercy. Read 2 Peter 3:18. People who have been badly abused and hurt through circumstances, if they learn lessons from those trials and never allow themselves to become indifferent or bitter, usually become very loving and caring people. Why? Because they know what hurt is, they feel and sense when others are hurt, and are compassionate.

There is a way for the converted Christian to see if his orientation is with the world and its ways or if he is striving to do the will of Christ. A person of the world and its system finds pleasure in drawing attention to himself, such as wearing flashy clothing, having a stylish automobile, or any extravagance that may tend to exalt the self. You can see that sort of thing every day in this world. People are selfish and are out to serve the self. It is interesting that the cause of anger in most people comes from feeling that they were either cheated, hurt, or in some way deserving of something better. Sometimes a person can be of service to others just to exalt the self rather than simply to be of service to them. Satan once

was lifted up in his own eyes and that was the cause of his fall. The way to know that we are serving Christ our Savior is not to serve ourselves but those whom we have the opportunity to serve and to do it completely without expectation of acknowledgment. Our way of knowing that we are serving Christ is in Matthew 25:40, "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." And in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

I started out on this long road back in 1967 when I was baptized in the Radio Church of God, and it has been a rather bumpy ride because of all that has taken place over the years. But I am more convinced today than ever that we truly have been given that pearl of great price which makes the riches of this world look like filthy rags. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46). We have so much in which to rejoice and be thankful when we come before God on the Sabbath and the Holy Days, that there is never room to bring any negative thought into the presence of God, especially in our worship services. By the very fact that we have accepted this way of life proves that we were truly called and had the truth revealed or we would be like everyone else, doing our own thing in this Babylonian system. We were given a great promise in Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." We are a very blessed and scattered church but in loving concern and prayer for one another we can be united in spirit. May God's richest blessings with understanding and peace be with each of you.

In much love, your brother,

Leon S. Whitaker

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