

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

There is an interesting dichotomy occurring within this remnant body at the present time. On the one hand, a number of brethren are enduring serious personal trials, whether it be in physical health, mental and emotional battles, family relationships, job and economic conditions, or other spiritual issues. On the other hand, this body as a whole continues to be incredibly blessed by God, with peace, vitality, unity, and benefits both physical and spiritual. We are reminded daily to thank God for preserving this organized fellowship for the edification of us all. No man can ever take credit for that. Our very existence and continuity over the last thirty years is a testament to God's hand to preserve miraculously.

With this contrast between the blessings of the church as a whole, but the difficult trials of many of our members individually, how do we reconcile that state of affairs? Is it an indication that something is insidiously wrong with this group? Some have so claimed. Some have concluded—judged—that if we were truly a faithful remnant, pleasing in God's sight, many more of our members would be enjoying greater blessings than they are. And therefore—with the assessment that "not enough" are being blessed—there must be something systemically wrong with *the church*. To them, if we were truly pleasing God as a collective body, many more members currently suffering would be blessed with dramatic release from trial. The question is, is this conclusion sound reasoning, or is there a flaw in that train of thought?

In beginning to answer that, let us be plain that the ministry of this remnant will not be seen by some as objective in commenting. Some will assume we are inherently biased to want to defend the status quo. And if we are truly burying our heads in the sand and ignoring issues that God wants us—the ministry—to address and fix, that might well be true. But that is something each individual must decide. The only thing we can do—as shepherds devoted to the welfare of Christ's Body—is proclaim the truth without reserve, and then let the chips fall where they may. In the end, each one of you must draw your own conclusions, whether you think you are hearing the very inspiration of Jesus Christ through these written words, or merely the personalized concepts of the carnal instrument.

That being said, how do we reconcile the dichotomy of individual trial of members within a body that is being blessed as a collective group? Would those suffering members immediately receive some great blessing if *the ministry* would finally wake up and stop doing—or start doing—something that *they* should do?

To begin with, that conclusion is based upon a *presumption* that very few individuals in this group are being blessed. That is not true! You may not hear nearly as much about the daily blessings of many brethren (because we seem to focus more attention on those who are suffering and need our urgent and collective prayers), but let that not lead any to conclude we are void of blessings. This ministry receives testimonials from our members around the world by telephone, letter, and e-mail, about the incredible ways God has intervened to work out difficult circumstances and dilemmas. This is very commonplace. In many cases, those instances might be of a very private nature, and only the ministry is aware of both the initial problem and its miraculous resolution. But more so, the fruit of spiritual growth in so many lives of those who have been fighting successfully to overcome serious problems—even with great pain to the carnal mind—is a continual inspiration and evidence that the Holy Spirit certainly is working here. There is real spiritual growth taking place within the lives of *many* members of this remnant. That is not political spin, but an honest assessment of the fruits being borne, day by day. Such changes in orientation of mind do not—and cannot—happen unless God is close at hand, empowering through His Holy Spirit.

Are the Faithful Free of Trial?

But those blessings do not change the fact that there *are* many current cases of trial in the lives of God's people, in many different arenas of life. Does that fact mean the church must be guilty of some negligence? Is there a promise that if the ministry does everything right, church members will be free of trial?

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby (Hebrews 12:4–11).

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit (John 15:2).

If we are truly God's faithful children—holding fast to sound doctrine—then God will be working with us aggressively to help us learn to bear *more* fruit. The faithful remnant of God's people will never exist in a vacuum, waiting in cold storage for the return of Christ. We all have much work to do in purging out sin and putting on more of the mind of Christ. It is a lifelong endeavor.

Most Are Not Growing Spiritually

While God can and is working aggressively to develop character in those who are pliable in His hands, the majority of those called in this age have refused to grow spiritually. With many of His froward children who have turned away from the Truth, He is leaving them alone to pay the price of their own rebellion.

The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint (Isaiah 1:3–5).

This is a prophecy for God's church of the last days. It is a prophecy about Israel, not the unconverted world. It describes the state of the church at large, who like their ancient predecessors, always perverted God's revealed way with their own customs. The commands God gave were "too hard" for them. They were not willing to change themselves to comply with God's laws, but sought to change God's laws to suit their human desires. Israel always sought ways to make worship of God "easier" or more appealing to human tastes. Even so, they were never willing to reject *out of hand* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. No, they continued to use His name and claim His promises. But they consistently grafted in pagan customs as part of their worship. They were still keeping some semblance of the Sabbaths God commanded, but God did not accept their offerings because they were doing so according to their own customs, not God's.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the

solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood (verses 11–15).

So they did not all give up being religious, and they certainly did not give up using the name of the true God in their worship services. But that did not mean they were close to God. Because they rejected God, He was not with them. And without God close at hand, there can be no legitimate personal growth.

It is this very same proclivity which is evident in the behavior of so many who were once called to a knowledge of God's Truth in this age. Most who were called into the true church have embraced the perverted doctrines of the 1970s and beyond, including rejection of the long-standing teachings on the nature of man, Pentecost, divorce and remarriage, divine healing, and many others. Why did these changes begin to take place so rapidly in the early 1970s? Why was that particular point in time so pivotal?

Prophetic Failure of 1972

Recall that for decades the ministry of the Radio Church of God had pointed to 1972 as significant in Biblical prophecy. The year 1972 fell at the calculated beginning of a new nineteen-year time cycle. Those previous benchmarks (1934 and 1953) had marked events very significant in the growing church. What would that next major event be in 1972? Although it was always couched as mere speculation—not a certainty—the people were nevertheless encouraged to view 1972 as the time God would take His Church to the place of safety, in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ 3½ years later, in 1975. Such conditioning was very evident in writings like the 1956 booklet, *1975 In Prophecy*.

But what was the unintended effect of fostering this kind of expectation in the minds of God's people? Many who were flooding into the church in the 1950s and 1960s were given to believe the return of Christ would occur within ten to twenty years at the most. Many had responded to the warnings about coming great tribulation and were anxious to do anything necessary to be spared in a place of safety.

But is that the recipe for a membership who really loves God's commandments and views them as a pearl of great price? Or did not many—even perhaps the majority—really respond because they wanted to be saved from wrath coming to this earth? Yes indeed. Many made their first priority getting into the place of safety. Therefore, if the church taught that Sabbaths must be kept, divorced people must remain single, doctors and hospitals must be avoided, and pagan customs must be eschewed, certainly they could bear under that "hard law" for a decade or so. After all, "Once we flee to the place of safety in 1972, it will all be downhill from there!"

So what happened when 1972 came and went and it became very evident that major events prophesied to occur before the return of Christ were not yet maturing? Spiritual Israel began to murmur, just like their forerunners in the desert with Moses. It was one thing to endure the "burden" of God's laws for a few short years, but with no end in sight, and the prospect of having to "obey" for the rest of our natural lives, that was simply untenable for many. Just like ancient Israel, God's church of the last days began to clamor for relief from God's "bondage."

Marriage was the first major target, to allow these many spiritual eunuchs to "legally" remarry again, in spite of the fact they already had living mates. And how best to make such a monumental change in doctrine without seeming to depart from the Truth? Begin to claim growing in grace and knowledge means changing doctrine when we find we are wrong. Insinuate Mr. Armstrong was not led by God to a knowledge of the truth, but figured things out from his own Bible study. Then denigrate him as being no "scholar" and turn to the wisdom of the world for proof of true doctrine. Claim that the proof we are really God's Church is that we will change when proved wrong. And then begin by picking on a doctrine that is very technical and hard to understand anyway—the Pentecost count. After setting a precedent for major doctrinal change with Pentecost, reveal the true target of the scheme soon thereafter—approval of divorce and remarriage.

And so the announcement of the Pentecost change came in February, 1974, followed three months later by the D&R change in May, 1974. The growing number of murmuring laymembers who viewed God's commandments as a burden were finally permitted to commit adultery with the church's blessing, and the ministry felt more secure that they had averted a major uprising from within. But is that not exactly what Aaron did when he sought to pacify the Israelites at Mt. Sinai?

And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play (Exodus 32:1–6).

Notice that all the while they were breaking the second commandment, they were still offering a feast in the name of the true God, as if God would respect such an idolatrous offering. And Aaron—the legitimate High Priest—was facilitating their sin. Why did he do it? That is what Moses asked.

And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief (Exodus 32:21–22).

So because the people were restless for their own ways—set on mischief—the High Priest gave in to political pressure. When Jesus Christ likewise did not return soon enough for them, God's people in our day clamored for the gods of their flesh, and the priests gave them what they demanded. History repeats itself amazingly.

Why Is God's Law a Burden?

Why then do God's people always chart the same course to disobedience? It is because they never come to really value God's laws as something priceless to be kept. To them, God's commands are hard sayings to be circumvented at every cost. They love the promises God made to those who would be obedient, and they certainly want to receive those blessings. But they always seek to find a way to make those "hard" obligations a little bit more palatable to the carnal mind. We want God's good things, but we want to fill our own lusts as much as possible with his approval along the way. But God will not allow us to have our cake and eat it too. No, it requires a monumental *change of the mind* to really come to love God's laws and be willing to defend them, no matter what the cost. And learning that kind of real love for God's ways is the only path to salvation. David showed us what that love must be like in each one of us:

O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. 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. I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments. I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word. Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments. My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law. The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not

from thy precepts. Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end (Psalm 119:97–112).

If the majority of the members of our parent affiliation had had that kind of love for God's truths, we would not have seen the repeat of mass apostasy in our day.

Crucifixion of Self the Key

God's way of life requires a commitment to daily crucifixion of the carnal mind, and transformation to put on the mind of Jesus Christ.

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God (Romans 6:6–13).

Fulfilling this requirement is the hardest thing a human being will ever do. Committing to deny the natural urges that demand to be satisfied and learning instead to respond through the Holy Spirit is an all-consuming battle. And that battle will rage in the life of a true Christian as long as he or she lives in the flesh. This is why the whole key to receiving salvation in God's eternal Family is proving we are willing to be overcomers—self-crucifiers!

. . . To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7).

. . . He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death (Revelation 2:11).

. . . To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it (Revelation 2:17).

And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels

of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father (Revelation 2:26–27).

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels (Revelation 3:5).

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name (Revelation 3:12).

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne (Revelation 3:21).

Who then will make it into God's Kingdom as one of the firstfruits? Those and only those who love God's promises enough to set about the hard work of lifelong overcoming of this carnal nature. It is those who are willing to be brutally honest before God about their shortcomings, and urgent to engage the enemy and crucify these natural minds. All others need not apply!

Do we begin to understand then why so many have failed in times past? How many are really willing to endure the painful process of self-denial for a lifetime, if necessary? Very few. But what does this have to do with the initial topic of personal trials in the lives of our members?

Those Who Bear Fruit

The few who are willing to make that ultimate sacrifice are the ones who love God's laws the way King David did. They see those laws, not as a curse which must be borne, but the very jewels that show us how to have real joy. It is these who possess a true love of God's laws that He can work with to bear spiritual fruit. It is these who are the willing pupils in an educational program leading to royal offices in the government of Jesus Christ. The student who will not listen, take instruction, or apply himself, will benefit little from university training. But the student who takes that process seriously and applies himself diligently will be given extra help by a good teacher to help him achieve even more.

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit (John 15:2).

If you are one who has not repudiated the revealed doctrines of Christ and turned to the idolatrous perversions of man's wisdom, then you are one whom God can work with at this time. And if He can work with you, you will face trial and purging to make you stronger. There are many who have become so hardened in rebellion, God has turned His back on them for now. "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more . . ." (Isaiah 1:5). This does not mean they are not suffering for their sins. They certainly are. But God—for the time being—is leaving them to their own devices, just like the world, to let them prove the fallacy of their ways by their own sorrow and misery.

But anyone who thinks the faithful of God will have an easy life while only evil ones will suffer should read their Bibles a little more closely:

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you (1 Peter 5:10).

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; *if so be that we suffer with him*, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but *ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves*, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:16–23) [emphasis mine].

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation (2 Corinthians 1:5–7).

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom *I have suffered the loss of all things*, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ,

the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and *the fellowship of his sufferings*, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead (Philippians 3:7–11) [emphasis mine].

The time left before the return of Christ is getting shorter with each passing day. We do not know how long that may be, and we do not intend to speculate. But it is certain we must all be sure to make the most of that time to put on more of Christ's mind, and that requires more diligence in overcoming. "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). One of the reasons this group will never be popular with some, is that we preach personal overcoming as the number one responsibility of a Christian. Most of our former brethren do not want to hear that. They would prefer to think they can gain God's favor by studying their Bibles a certain amount every day, doing some evangelistic work, or deciphering details about future prophecy. Those endeavors are a whole lot less painful than getting into the muck of one's own sins and purging out the swill.

Whose Responsibility for Trial?

We began this letter by addressing the dichotomy of personal trials of individual church members vs. the blessings of this remnant body as a whole. What about those personal trials? Is this evidence that the ministry is somehow negligent? If Church of God, The Eternal became free from guilt for some specific error—either by omission or commission—would many member trials then disappear? If that is true, the organization itself should be reflecting some major systemic problems right now. But if that is not the case, it is more likely such assertion is simply misplaced.

If God is unhappy with something being done—or not done—by this ministry, it is those ministers whom God will correct. That is not to say our members should accept *anything* we might preach, thinking they will not be held personally accountable by God for keeping the Truth. Not at all! That was the very perversion taught in 1974 to help the laity accept heretical doctrines. They were told they were only required to obey church government. But no, God will hold each one of us accountable for knowing and holding to His Truth. You had better have your confidence in teachings that were confirmed from the beginning by Jesus Christ through the preaching of His chosen servant. No man—minister or otherwise—has any authority for changing God's revelation.

But God does not hold one party guilty for the sins of another. If the ministry is failing to carry out a function God deems necessary, He will not curse the laity for that failing, if the brethren are doing what they should. For example, it has been claimed by some in times past that some of our members are being "cursed" because this ministry refuses to do an evangelistic work to the world. The logic goes, "If only the ministry would wake up and see that God

requires us to spread the gospel to the world, I would not be experiencing the personal problem I am in my life." But is that really the way God works? If God's purpose was really to get a minister to wake up and stop resisting His will, does it make sense that He would curse the laity to accomplish that purpose? Is God sitting on His throne in heaven, wringing His hands in frustration because the ministers faithfully preserving the true doctrines are however bull-headed in resisting His commission to do a work? Is God therefore picking on various laymembers with trials of health, marriage, economic, or other sufferings to try and send that minister a message? In the meantime, is God's will being thwarted because He wants a major warning to be going to the world *right now*, but the servants He has chosen to do it will not go?

The God we serve is not so weak. If God intends a work to be done, you can be assured it *will* be done, and right on schedule. When Jonah refused God's commission to warn Nineveh and ran the other way, did the Ninevites fail to be warned on schedule? Did God curse other Israelites with a plague to get Jonah to forsake his stubbornness? Never. He chastised Jonah directly, and did so with such prolific force that Jonah was humbled in ample time to fulfill that commission *right on time*. If this example shows the way the mind of our Creator works, how do we think this unchanging God would handle such an issue today? One thing is for sure, He would not rain curses upon the laity to get the ministry to correct a negligence in the realm of church administration.

How Should We Interpret Trials?

If God is not cursing the laity to correct the ministry, how then should we view those trials we may be facing? The natural proclivity in us all is to deflect responsibility and seek to make our problems those of someone else. But how can we ever really learn necessary lessons if we refuse to take responsibility for our own circumstances? Making the ministry or other brethren the scapegoats for our trials is a losing proposition every time. One who does that is shutting off the voice of the schoolmaster and refusing to be taught.

There are three major categories of personal trials. The first two are described by the Apostle Peter:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Peter 4:12–16).

One reason we may suffer trial and persecution is that we are faithfully obeying God, even as Jesus Christ suffered immeasurably, yet being perfect. God never promised that the just would avoid persecution. In fact, if we are to walk in Christ's footsteps, we have to be prepared to face the very same hatred and ridicule that He did.

But the other category Peter lists is suffering as a lawbreaker. In reality, if we are suffering, our first assumption should never be that we are innocent and only "suffering for righteousness sake." We are all weak in the flesh, and we all sin daily. So if we experience bad things, is it not wise to consider strongly that it might be because *we* have done something wrong to bring a penalty of God's law upon us? That must *never* be an evaluation we make concerning someone else's trial. But it should always be the *first* area we examine concerning the self.

For example, if we experience sickness, in most cases a physical law has been broken. In certain cases it might not be our direct fault, but in many cases it has everything to do with faulty diet or some other abuse of our bodies, past or present. Lawbreaking causes pain and suffering. And because none of us has attained perfection in the flesh, we *all* suffer to a certain extent from our sins, both physical and spiritual. We need to stop hiding from that fact and come to grips with it. It can be frustrating if we have tried everything we know to do and still suffer. But there are many who claim they are doing everything correctly, but who are ignoring clear guidelines for good health. In times past certain ones have fretted because they were not healed of certain chronic ailments, yet the very things they openly bought and displayed in their homes as "food" violated everything we have learned about proper diet. If one of you is not being healed, it is worth taking a second, third, or even fourth inventory of your personal diet. Do not evaluate based on what man's wisdom says is healthy. Use God's guidelines as revealed through His chosen servant. Those principles have been strongly covered as of late. The same process should be used to examine *any and every* issue causing us to suffer, whether it be economic, marriage relationships, or any other physical or spiritual area of life. We have seen individuals fret because their marriages are in trouble, but will fail to take personal responsibility for their own lack of wisdom in dealing with their spouse. The ministry can counsel, but if that advice is rejected, please do not blame the church for your continuing problems.

But there may be a third category for our sufferings. This includes the trial that Job suffered. Recall that Job was more righteous than any man in his day (Job 1:1). Yet God intentionally allowed Satan to persecute him. He not only suffered the loss of his personal wealth and family, but was afflicted physically with severe boils. Those boils were not a result of Job breaking a physical health law, but a curse God allowed Satan to inflict for another reason. Job groaned under the weight of his trial and fretted because he felt he was being treated unfairly. But at the end he found out there was a valuable lesson he needed to learn, and when it was over, he was much richer and wiser for the experience. This is an example of God pruning and purging a responsive servant to achieve the next level of character development.

The so-called friends of Job were dead wrong to assert Job must be guilty of some terrible secret sin. In most cases, they might have been right to assume Job's suffering was a result of lawbreaking. After all, as we have already stated, that is the number one reason we suffer. But we must *never* make such a judgment concerning someone else's trial. To date, God has not given us the ability to judge such matters—any of us. Those who do so will receive a much more severe penalty from God (Job 42:7–9).

Where Do We Go From Here?

Whether Jesus Christ returns in the very near future, or not until after we have all lived out our natural lives, the question is whether we have the spiritual fortitude to continue as overcomers to the very end. "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13). If God's Truths are burdens we are "having to bear," chances are we will not be willing to sustain the fight against our natural natures long enough. In time we will seek justification to "lower the bar" of expectation.

Only those who really love that Law as David did will be willing to make the ongoing sacrifices necessary to preserve it in their lives. Only those who have that focused goal to be in God's eternal Family will be able to endure the pain of self-crucifixion without becoming weary. "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9). Only those who are willing pupils of our wise Schoolmaster will be able to receive Fatherly chastisement without becoming discouraged and defeated.

Not one of us has these characteristics by nature. We are just like our forefathers, and they failed time and time again. God recorded their failings so that we might learn from their mistakes (1 Corinthians 10:11–12). But if we ask God, He will give us even that will—motivation—which we lack, that we might *learn* to love His Truth more. It all hinges on what is most important to us.

The ministry of this small remnant body is very aware of the potential traps into which we might fall. It is certainly not only the laity that is challenged to hold fast to God's Truth. In fact, it has been through the ministry—the shepherds—that God's people have been so mis-served in times past (Jeremiah 23). But even if there is not an intention to merchandise the flock for personal gain, a shepherd might still succumb to political pressure to compromise doctrine to solve some crisis in the church, just like Aaron did.

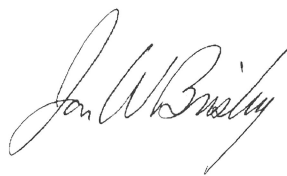
Mr. Raymond Cole was always well aware of that potential, and resolved that he intended never to compromise one iota of the faith once delivered to accommodate *any* individual. And God helping him, he never did. It was a marvelous example, especially in context of the many challenges he faced over the years. He fought war after war against those who rose up from within to try to press some personal agenda. There were men (and some

women) who thought they had political power to force their will at the threat of dividing the church. They soon found out Raymond Cole was not interested in preserving "numbers" of members or pacifying even the majority, if that required compromise of God's revelation. He often thundered that he intended to hold fast to those revealed doctrines even if there were no one else that would accept them. His faith was not contingent upon having *x*-number of people to support it. He knew the Truth because he had been taught it personally by God's end-time servant, and he refused to bend for any reason. Some hated him for that. He was willing to bear that hate as a price for God's favor—suffering for Christ's sake.

I can only pray that I may set that same kind of example of resolute determination until the very end of my tenure in this life, as a minister of Jesus Christ. Only time and personal fruits will tell. But I assure each and every one of you that I love the Truth God gave us, and God helping me, it will never become for sale because of any crisis that may arise. I expect them to come. There might one day arise a threat that has the potential to take *many* of our members by subtlety. But we are not going to fashion any golden calves no matter how overwhelming the demand. There are some—even now—who do not seem to get the fact that we will continue to hold fast to the *same teachings* we have preserved in this group for the last thirty years, period! Please do not waste your breath trying to advance some new interpretation of Scripture intended to change our position on either doctrine or administration. It is a slap in the face to this ministry to even think it might be considered after all we have said and done to certify what we hold dear. Please take us at our word, and if you insist on attaching yourself to some new strange doctrine, please take that with you somewhere else. It will not be tolerated here.

Dear brethren, you are the ones with the greatest opportunity for spiritual growth at this time in history. You are the ones God has placed within this body to teach and prepare for royal offices in the coming Kingdom of God. The trials you are bearing now are part of that training process to purge you and prune you to bear even more fruit. It is painful, but it is so very profitable. If you keep these things in mind, and refuse to compromise under the weight of that training, you can be among those who will receive the greatest of blessings in time. May we all stand fast as long as it takes to reap that priceless reward.

Yours humbly in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Jon W. Brisby