

Church of God, The Eternal

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June 2005

Dear Brethren:

Warm greetings from all here in the island of Mindanao, Southern Philippines.

It is really uplifting to have this opportunity again to speak to you through this letter and share with you matters of great importance for the people of God—members of the remnant group of His true church who are holding fast to the faith once delivered.

We have just observed the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread this year. We are about to keep the next of God's annual festivals, Pentecost, or the Feast of the Firstfruits. God is working through a small group of spirit-begotten humans, organized and unified by His laws and His truth. Those who were called into God's church are part of God's spiritual firstfruits—the first group to be offered salvation. The firstfruits have been called for the special purpose of being prepared for God's Kingdom.

Our calling is the first step in qualifying as God's firstfruits.

God is still harvesting a small group of Christians. So you might ask: How does one become part of this current group of firstfruits? The Bible reveals that people do not just decide to "give their heart to the Lord." Jesus explained this clearly to a group of His countrymen who were following Him about. He stated:

No man can come to me [Christ], except the Father which hath sent me draw him (John 6:44).

We are then told, from that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more (verse 66). The reason they stopped following Jesus was that they had not been given the spiritual capacity to understand His message. But this spiritual understanding *was given* to the small group of disciples Jesus was calling and training.

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given . . . Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand (Matthew 13:10–11, 13).

In this case, those who turned away had not been called!

God the Father drew us near to Him; no one can just join God's church unless He draws him or her.

The second step in qualifying as God's firstfruits is that we must be chosen.

Remember that Jesus said many would be called but few are chosen. The Bible shows numerous examples of this process in action. The nation of ancient Israel was chosen by God to be a model after which surrounding peoples would pattern themselves.

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. Your eyes have seen what the Lord did because of Baalpeor: for all the men that followed Baalpeor, the Lord thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deuteronomy 4:1–8).

However, the Israelites chose to disobey God's law and were rejected by Him. Saul was chosen as the first king of Israel but decided to follow his own reasoning instead of God's instructions and lost his special status (1 Samuel 15). Jeroboam was given the opportunity to lead ten tribes of Israel, but his religious innovation contrary to the will of God led those tribes astray, resulting in national captivity (1 Kings 12:32–33).

New Testament examples tell the same story. Although the church began on Pentecost teeming with members, new converts—3,000 baptized in one day (Acts 2:41)—it appears that over the years persecution and waning enthusiasm took their toll on the faithful. Paul mentions some thirty years later "that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Timothy 1:15). This fits the information Jesus Christ gives us concerning the early church. Describing the first-century Ephesian church, Christ says:

. . . thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick (Revelation 2:4–5).

Certain qualities of character, then, will be required of those who are called, in order to be chosen.

This second step in qualifying as God's firstfruits—being chosen—is expounded in the parable of the wedding supper:

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son. And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:2–14).

As chosen of God, we must be in proper attire. We must develop—without ceasing—His holy righteous character and we must produce fruits.

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you (John 15:16).

God chose us before we were born—before the foundation of the world—being predestined to be called to spiritual salvation. God has richly lavished upon us His grace.

The third step in qualifying as God's firstfruits is: We must be faithful.

When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:8)

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:7).

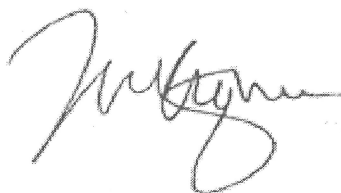
We must examine ourselves deeply, as God will measure our faith. We must go on with our struggle to hold fast to the truth. Praise, honor, and glory will be given to us if the faith of Christ is found in us when He returns. We can be heirs of the Kingdom only if we are rich in faith.

Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? (James 2:5).

If we remain faithful to our calling and election, we will qualify for the glorious and eternally-rewarding honor of being God's own firstfruits at the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Being faithful all the way until His return is our final umbilical cord to eternal life.

It is a breathtaking, exciting, and incredible sight to behold! When the Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful (Revelation 17:14).

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mario Y. Roque', with a stylized, cursive script.

Mario Y. Roque