

# Church of God, The Eternal

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September 2007

Dear Brethren:

To all who are called brethren, who believe they are justified through the "faith of Jesus Christ," greetings.

It is my ardent desire to address this letter to all who hear and understand God's word (John 8:47). Do you realize that in the Church of God, whenever we mention "our faith" we are referring to the faith of Jesus Christ (James 2:1)—the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3)? Because in this world when people mention their "faith" or "my faith" they simply mean their beliefs as established in their minds by what they learned and practiced in their religions— personally self-grown loyalties based on some set of doctrines or systems of religious practice.

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong used to mention the faith of Jesus Christ. In his sermons, as well as his articles, he often mentioned that we should not believe him, but believe the Scriptures; that we only follow him as long as he is following Christ. Paul in the same manner admonished the early Christians, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; Ephesians 5:1). Both mentioned the faith of Jesus Christ or the faith in Jesus Christ whenever they were talking about justification or righteousness. Hence, the relevant subject of this *Monthly Letter* is the faith of Jesus Christ as it applies today, compared to the early beginnings of the Church of God.

## **Personal Beliefs Versus the Faith of Jesus Christ**

A personal belief is one built in the mind through hearing and accepting a belief that is logical and attractive to the human nature. It is often based on its universality and acceptability to the higher brackets of society. Human emotion or sentiment often plays an important role in establishing it. Personal and common opinion grows toward a mental certainty of conviction called faith.

One who believes in animism lives in a world of spirits or gods whom he trusts and strives to please and serve while he lives. His faith is not bestowed upon him by any of these gods nor derived from any spirits in which he believes. Rather, it is a personal faith grown from his daily experiences and interactions with his environment. True also with a monotheist, who believes in only one God. He thinks he knows God and relates himself to Him through traditions of his ancestors. Through the practice and observance of certain religious rites, whether indigenous or adopted from other cultures, his trust and confidence becomes established in himself. The growing acceptance of the belief by the social order becomes a common faith on which to cling. Thus the nature of the faith most people claim to have today is one that is developed and grown from within the mind of the individual.

In some cases faith is whatever is forced upon the mind through indoctrination, or by a decree of a human head or leader of the group.

Faith, in this sense, can be developed through adherence to whatever is accepted in one's mind.

Let me give you a couple of examples of personal faith versus the faith of Jesus Christ. In John 8:39–41, Jewish national conviction is typified by the belief that they are the children of Abraham and therefore have the faith of Abraham and the promises attached to it. They claim God as their one and only Father. "They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our Father . . . Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God" (verses 39, 41).

So you see, Jesus, expounded His faith to them. Yet, they insisted upon adherence to their own faith, even accusing Jesus of committing blasphemy and having a devil because He said He was the Son of God. But such assertion was concluded by Jesus as unbelief. So the faith of the carnal mind is void without the faith of Christ replacing it. One who professes faith and a relationship with God while walking in darkness is lying (1 John 1:6). Even he who claims he knows God but does not keep His commandments is also a liar (1 John 2:4). But how can one know and have fellowship with God and keep His commandments unless he first has the faith of Jesus Christ?

. . . no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him (Luke 10:22).

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:44).

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Romans 8:7).

Understanding and obeying God's commandments seems to be dependent upon divine mercy and empowerment. Human enthusiasm and motivation do not produce the attainment of that knowledge and fellowship with the Most High.

We need the faith of Christ, not building our own faith upon human emotion, nor by human reason, theory or speculation.

Another example is Saul, a Pharisee under the tutelage of Gamaliel. He developed his personal faith in God, as he was taught. He cleaved with a singular tenacity to the doctrines he learned, and claimed to be: "an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee" (Philippians 3:5). His carnal notion was full of fervor and zeal to defend his faith. He got permission from the High Priest and went about his own way to persecute those who had the faith of Christ (Acts 22:3–5; 26:4–18).

To remain in this kind of faith (mentality), even though it appears to be a belief in one God, with all sincere intent and purpose, is of the self—a personal and carnal conviction, commonly called faith.

On the other hand the faith of Jesus Christ, which is placed in us, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon us, at the same time and manner that the "love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the [same] Spirit" (Romans 5:5).

The faith of Christ was delivered to Saul at his baptism. The Holy Spirit not only changed his name to Paul, but his entire outlook, interpretations and discipline, even his total purpose in life. No longer in his personal faith as a Pharisee but having the Faith of Jesus Christ, he said:

. . . now I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the son of God . . . (Galatians 2:20) [see also Philippians 3:4–8].

Is there a difference if we say: "now I have faith, yet not mine, but of Christ who lives in me"?

Later, he said to the Christians in Corinth: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you . . .?" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

We can also see his insight about manifesting the righteousness of Christ as "revealed from faith to faith" (Romans 1:17), not self-righteousness. Just as Jesus said:

... except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).

Even his interpretation about the law is so confusing to many, they think Paul was anti-law, and so teach that the law—the Ten Commandments—are done away, no longer binding upon Christians. But careful verification of Paul's mind in the faith of Christ reveals that he kept the law. His point was, without the faith of Jesus Christ, keeping the law is futile and void as a basis for righteousness (Philippians 3:8–9). So we can find Paul in all of his admonitions to the brethren saying to avoid all those "fruits of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19–21), which are also those that were strictly prohibited in the Ten Commandments. So we can find Paul saying:

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. . . . Wherefore the law is holy, the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful (Romans 7:7, 12–13).

What Paul was emphasizing was the carnal mind versus the spiritual mind—the righteousness by the law versus righteousness by the faith of Jesus. Hence, he said, "the just shall live by faith." Was he making the law void because of faith? By no means; he established the law.

... by grace are ye saved through faith [the faith of Jesus Christ]; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

Those were the affirmations of Paul after his total change as a result of receiving the Holy Spirit and accepting the faith. But the carnal mind can develop its own brand of "faith" that cannot please God without the Spirit of Christ bearing the fruit of real faith (Romans 8:5–7). Without the faith of Jesus Christ totally taking the place of our own human faith (from faith to faith), it makes a great difference in our ability to discern spiritual truth. That is why so many are at variance in their own interpretations about Paul's writings concerning the keeping of the law and grace, faith and works, righteousness and justification, and other related subjects "hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

Do you fully understand, brethren, and believe that your present faith in Christ is not of yourselves; but the gift of God, the fruit of His Spirit in us (Ephesians 2:4–8; Romans 3:22; Galatians 2:16; 5:22–25)?

### **A Personal Observation**

The same problem surfaced in God's last-day church as well. From the inception of God's work through the Radio Church of God in the 1930s, the faith of Jesus Christ was delivered by the Holy Spirit to that Body. God gave that divine inspiration through a chosen servant, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. Knowledge of real Truth was given through him by a miracle. But over the years, ministers in that body sought changes because they were worried God's commands were too difficult for the people to keep, and they were afraid many would leave. They did not want the money to go away. Those men did not really believe God had planted His Truth in the church from the beginning, at its foundation. They thought Herbert Armstrong had assembled those teachings by his own human faith. They believed their scholarship was better than his, and that the doctrines could be improved. It takes the faith of Jesus Christ to believe God revealed unchanging truth from the beginning. It takes that same faith to hold fast and refuse to change, no matter what pressures may be applied in later years. These men reverted to their own concept of faith—faith in their own human abilities. In the 1970s, they led God's church away from the faith of Jesus Christ into error, with the corruption of the marriage doctrine, the keeping of Pentecost on Sunday (an abomination), the rejection of God as Healer, and many other perversions that followed. They began to teach that God's apostle had the authority to change doctrine, and God would back it up. They encouraged the people to put their faith in Herbert Armstrong (the man) and anything he might choose to allow through political pressure, rather than confirm our faith in the unchanging Christ, who never reveals a lie.

### **The Danger and Result of Regression**

Human carnality, even though it has tasted "the heavenly gift" (Hebrews 6:4), can retrogress to its former "personal faith." The former religious orientation seems to have a strong pull like that of gravity that influences any object soaring towards the sky. Human wisdom runs counter to the wisdom and power of God, appearing as "having the form of godliness but denying the power thereof." Total repentance, just before baptism, should include the dumping off of all our own beliefs and knowledge, including our own "personal faith," or else the same will pull us back in times of confusing situations. You may say, "Why? My previous faith was not entirely wrong." But it requires spiritual discernment to sort out spiritual truth from error (1 Corinthians 2:14). To retain the error—the things you think are good in your personal belief—leaves a perilous possibility of reverting back to your

own faith in times of conflicting situations. It is true that our personal beliefs, derived from our ancestors, were partly instrumental to our calling. Our parents brought us regularly to a Sunday school class. Our grandparents saw to it that we sat together and were still during the family evening devotions. When we were big enough to read the Bible we memorized verses to recite for some occasions. All of these religious exercises were excellent practices in molding our personal faith. But when we were drawn by the Father to His dear Son and decided to repent and be baptized in Him, were we not willing to give up all these things and totally embrace a new orientation in the faith of Jesus Christ? Did we not learn a complete deleavening in the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread? The feast should remind us that all the old leaven is to be discarded totally. As we were buried in baptism, so we rose up (after baptism) in a new way of life. Beware the perils of retaining any of the "gentile" orientation in us.

Remember Peter, the magician, also called Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:14–27)? He submitted himself for baptism. He received access to the faith just as the five foolish virgins received access to the faith—the "lamp and the oil" (Matthew 25:1–10). But retrogressing to his former orientation brought him back to lust for power, as he once practiced in his sorceries. With that remaining reservation in his mind, though already baptized, he thought he could combine both personal interest and demonstration of divine power. The result is that he lost the "oil" of his lamp and with that, forfeited the gift—the faith once bestowed to him by the same Spirit. Having turned back to his own belief, he did not discern. The Spirit of God being grieved by his double mindedness ultimately left him on his own. It is an example and a warning to us that once we receive the faith of Christ, we should not revert to the faith we once had on our own (Hebrews 6:4–6).

Is this not what happened to some church leaders who retrogressed to their traditional beliefs while trying to "fix" the doctrines? They thought their changes—"refinements"—were more important than those that came from the faith of Jesus Christ. Is it not because they retained some of their former beliefs, that the members also easily slipped back into their own faith?

The Lord Jesus said that He is the Truth, the Way and the Life. Does any man have the right to introduce his own idea and put it side by side with that of Christ who is the manifestation of absolute truth? By way of example, during the universal celebration of Christmas among the peoples of this world, is it right to associate Christ with a legendary Santa distributing gifts with his red-nosed reindeer? So can one justify exchanging gifts as the spirit of Christmas, because it is true that "God so loved the world that He gave his only Son," as a gift?

Can a man justify divorce and become remarried, placing that idea side by side with the truth in Christ? Indeed it is absurd for those who are once enlightened to associate truth with error as part of their faith.

Let us have a look at another situation: Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11). They were with the first members of the Church. They personally believed the preaching of Peter. The Church was of one accord in mind and purpose (Acts 4:32). They were "of one heart and of one soul." Ananias and Sapphira sold their possessions as did others. But their carnal nature failed to discern the faith of Jesus Christ that unites the saints as one body in Christ. Even having the faith, their minds were overwhelmed with their own "wisdom" (folly) to reserve and hide a portion of their possession—a part of their own thinking, their own previous personal faith. They failed to live by the faith of Christ bestowed upon them. Reverting to their own, they were cut off from the union of God's people. Many well-meaning leaders and members of the church today went back to their own faith, not discerning the faith once delivered. Desiring for world recognition as an established religion, they went back to the popular beliefs, the faith of this world, to escape being branded as "a cult" by the world religious society. Backed up by scholars and wise men of this world, they laid aside the faith once delivered to them, bringing disunity and division to the body. The hundreds of splinter groups, asserting their own version of the faith, failed to discern the flesh and blood of Christ at Passover. Is the divided body of Christ to remain in disunity while every year at Passover (some taking it weekly) the ministers repeat the Passover formula, "Take, eat: this is my body . . . This cup is the new testament in my blood . . ."? Paul said that before one could partake of the Passover he should ". . . examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, *not discerning the Lord's body*" (1 Corinthians 11:24–25, 28–29) [emphasis mine].

The yearly Passover observance should remind us that the faith of Jesus Christ, bestowed upon us at baptism, is further reinforced by our union with His flesh and blood.

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him (John 6:56).

A perfect unity in the faith: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

Is the faith of Christ divided? Is it present in all of these organizations each calling themselves Church of God? Where the Spirit of Christ is, there is His Faith and where His faith is, there is unity. He prayed:

That they all may be one; [as we are one] as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us . . . (John 17:21).

Where is the fulfillment of this prayer of our Lord among these divided groups? Where is the faith whereby we are united in one body? The faith of Jesus Christ—the faith once delivered to the saints—is different from our own personal faith. It is defined in Hebrews 11:1 as "the [assurance] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Your own personal faith could not stand that definition. Without this faith one cannot please God (verse 6). The word *faith*, used in Hebrews 11, pertains to the faith of Jesus Christ as it was delivered to all the personages mentioned in the faith chapter. May we all have the gift of spiritual discernment to accept this fact and align ourselves among the saints of God who lived the faith.

At Passover, when we discern the body of Christ—"we are in Him and He in us"—He becomes alive in the flesh in us. In our lives and in our daily habits—in the spirit—we are confessing that He "is come in the flesh." He who does not confess that He is come in the flesh has the spirit of the antichrist, which is in the world today (1 John 4:2–3).

Can we come together in the unity of the Faith of Jesus Christ, through which we can unite and be together, confessing that He indeed *is* come in the flesh? Where and when can all so-called churches of God come together ". . . in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men" (Ephesians 4:13–14)?

At Pentecost we should become aware of the entire measure of the Holy Spirit that everyone should receive. The faith of Jesus Christ should unite us and make us of one accord on that day, just as on the day of the inception of the New Testament Church of God at Jerusalem (Acts 2). The faith of Christ once delivered to the saints was also delivered to the end-time church. In unity, for at least forty years, the Church kept the faith, and so observed the Day of Pentecost on a Monday. The personal faith of men, reverting to tradition, caused the disunity and chaos.

It was a clear denial of the "spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2). My brethren, as the branches were almost pruned down to the "vine" (John 15:1–2), some remaining branches are still robust, being taken care of by the merciful husbandman, and are bearing the fruits of the Spirit, one of which is our faith. Today when we read "your faith" mentioned in the Scriptures it pertains to the Faith of Jesus Christ which is also in us. Now we can read the second epistle of Peter as an admonition also to us who are called in this end-time remnant Church of God:

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like *precious faith* with us through the righteousness of God and our

Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge . . . For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore . . . give *diligence to make your calling and election sure*: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall (2 Peter 1:1–10) [emphasis mine].

### **Benefits Derived From the Faith of Jesus Christ**

Wherefore, brethren, with the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ in us, we have "the [assurance] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." We believed and received the rewards, though as yet unseen; we confirm our hope because our knowledge and faith did not come from ourselves but from the Lord. Although I am sure you know the benefits you derived from the faith since you came to believe in Him, I will briefly identify a few in this letter for our mutual comfort and joy:

*Our assurance for the hope of the resurrection in Christ.* This hope gives us joy as we wait for the Lord's return, for the blessedness of having a part of the first resurrection. The wonderful evidence of the unity and fellowship with Christ in the Holy Spirit. It is great and pleasant when the brethren remain unified, glorifying God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord in all that we think, say and do. This is God's urgent call to all His people around the world before our Lord Jesus Christ comes (1 Corinthians 1:10). With His faith alive in us, we bring to fulfillment His prayer for unity in John 17.

*The blessings of peace in a life justified through faith.* Freely we walk by faith and not by sight. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. So we can "walk in the light, as he is in the light . . . and the blood of [His Son] cleanseth us from all sin"—the basis of our redemption (1 John 1:7; Acts 20:28).

*The power to overcome and endure to the end.* This is another benefit we derived from the faith once delivered. It is the faith of Jesus Christ that gives us the endurance to go on with all the tests and temptations that come our way. The great number of witnesses that were before us confirm this truth (Hebrews 11).

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith . . . (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Brethren, peace and joy be with you all.

With much love and prayers for you all,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Corsino C. Canta". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name being more prominent.

Corsino C. Canta

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon W. Brisby". The script is cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Jon W. Brisby