

# Church of God, The Eternal

P. O. Box 775  
Eugene, Oregon 97440  
[www.cogeternal.org](http://www.cogeternal.org)

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

Offices in: United States  
Philippines  
Switzerland  
Kenya

October 2008

Dear Brethren:

With the myriad groups which have formed out of our parent organization—the Worldwide Church of God—over the past four decades, God's church seemingly has become a free-for-all of self-appointed religionists, claiming legitimacy to take up the mantle of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, and selling their wares like street vendors on a city boulevard. In the June 2008 issue of this letter, we examined the phenomenon of self-proclaimed prophets, and the means by which God provided His people with the ability to test their fruits specifically and to verify or to disprove their legitimacy. This month we want to address a similar topic, but rather than looking at the narrow realm of prophets alone, we want to tackle the wider issue of remnant groups in general who share history in the work of Mr. Armstrong. With so many groups—and individual leaders of those groups—claiming authority to speak and act in the name of Jesus Christ today, how can sincere children of God sift through all the claims of competing factions and know with confidence where God truly is abiding and working? The faithful need never be confused.

## **They All Look and Sound So Much Alike**

An increasing number of former members of God's church seem to be seeking to reconnect with their spiritual roots. Having been scattered to the four winds by traumatic events which destroyed the unified body, many simply disappeared for a time into the woodwork, becoming discouraged and choosing either to forsake it outright or slowly to drift away. But finding that there really is no resting place in this world, and discovering through hard experience the emptiness of a life cut off from God and His true way of life, more and more of them are seeking to come out of that spiritual wilderness once more. Add to these the trickle of new converts who continue to come out of this world through first-time exposure to the preserved writings of Mr. Armstrong, and we have a contingent of called ones looking for a spiritual home.

But where will they go? To whom will they turn to help reestablish their spiritual foundations? The parent organization from whence we all came no longer teaches those things, and in fact is embarrassed that it ever did. So these wandering sheep have no choice but to turn to a host of competing daughter groups—hundreds of them—all seemingly vying for supremacy as the standard-bearers of Herbert Armstrong.

For most, it is a daunting challenge. What is the real difference in all of these groups? Is there any? If so, how much scrounging is required to get to the heart of those differences? After all, on the surface, many of them look and sound so much alike. Many are claiming to respect the legacy of Mr. Armstrong and championing the idea of defending his teachings. So many voices. Is it even possible to distinguish if one or more of them are truly legitimate?

The easiest response is the one which many others have taken: When faced with confusing choices we would prefer not to make, find a way to avoid making a decision at all. The best way to do this is to claim that all (or many) of the groups are legitimate and mutually-favored instruments of God. Become official members of none, but associate with many. Subscribe to literature and sermon programs of various groups, send tithes and offerings in rotation to a number of them, and attend Sabbath and Holy Days with different fellowships throughout the year. We understand how this would be a very attractive response to the current dilemma, but it still reflects nothing of the way God told His people to make these decisions:

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine . . . (John 7:17).

Can two walk together, except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3).

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 1:10–11).

These are only a very few samples which reflect the mind of God on the issue of fellowship and affiliation. Holding to *the* correct doctrine is everything. Like it or not, there is no Biblical evidence to justify flitting between multiple groups which hold doctrinal teachings at variance with one other, and claiming that they are all acting to some degree with God's favor. It surely would be nice if that were true, because then we could each avoid doing the *due diligence* necessary to discern the differences in all these groups and making concrete decisions about where God is residing. But it is not God's will to let any of us off the hook. No, quite the contrary, it is His express will to force us to use the instructions He provided in His Holy Scripture and to demonstrate the tenacity to make a decision, and then commit to it. It would be nice if we could just sit on the fence, but when has God's character ever been reflected in fence-sitting and double-mindedness?

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:6–8).

So once again, for those who are willing to engage in the process of discerning among the competing factions—because they know God requires it—how will they do so? What formula is available to help one distinguish between so many which on the surface sound credible? Is there really a way for God's children to make such evaluations, and then to know without doubt?

### **The Hardest Question of All**

One of the best ways to begin to "cull the herd" and to separate those with potential legitimacy from many of the pretenders, is to ask the question which many of these group leaders dread: By what authority do you now lead a church and claim to represent God in this age?

This question is posed very often by former members of the church who are now very bitter and who seek to denigrate any and all groups out there claiming to be carrying on God's work. No longer believing that Mr. Armstrong was a legitimate servant of God, they seek to make sport out of anyone who still believes that he actually was. They treat all of these remnant group leaders like mental-ward patients claiming to be the reincarnation of Napoleon Bonaparte. And the very best way to have the most fun with them is to question their fundamental authority for doing what they are doing. Why is this angle of attack so effective? Because many of these remnant group leaders have absolutely nothing to call upon to substantiate themselves. The recalcitrant mockers love to see so many of them squirm. But is this kind of ploy something new to our age? Actually, it is the very same tactic which has been used throughout human history to demean and to ridicule.

Moses feared to accept God's commission because he was afraid he would not credibly be able to answer this very same question:

And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? . . . And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? . . . And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee (Exodus 3:11, 13; 4:1).

God provided the means for Moses to overcome these doubts in his introduction to the leaders of Israel in Egypt, but the very same spirit of questioning and doubt continued to plague him, even years later:

And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: *wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?* (Numbers 16:3) [emphasis mine].

They were really asking—through the same flippant sarcasm—by what authority do you claim to be a legitimate spokesman for God any more than are we? Notice that it was the very same spirit manifested in the questioning of Jesus Christ Himself by the leaders of this same Israelite nation centuries later:

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? (Matthew 21:23).

In this particular instance, Jesus refused to answer them, because He knew they were not interested in a serious explanation. Their minds were not open at all to the possibility He might actually be the emissary of God. That is why He answered in a way which revealed their hypocrisy. But that does not mean that the question, when asked from a heartfelt desire to know the Truth, is wrong. In fact, it is very legitimate—even necessary—for all of God's people to ask that question of anyone claiming to represent God. With so many counterfeits out there in the world, we are commanded to try the spirits and to discern the difference (1 John 4:1). The errancy of many of these pretenders is made known by the shallowness manifested in their answers to this very basic question of authority.

### **How Then Should We Evaluate?**

If it is not only permissible, but mandatory, to verify the authority by which any man claims to speak in the name of God, how are we supposed to go about doing that? After all, they all have an answer of some kind. But what should we look for in discerning the legitimate from the fraudulent? And how should a truly legitimate remnant group be able to answer the irreverent taunts of the naysayers?

Given that the target audience of this letter is those who already believe that Mr. Herbert Armstrong was indeed the servant whom God raised up in this age to begin His last-



day work, we will start with that assumption of his legitimacy. After all, how would anyone ever accept one of the groups spawned by the Worldwide Church of God if he first rejected the legitimacy of that group's very founder? So if Herbert Armstrong were truly an apostle sent by God and inspired with the authority of Jesus Christ to speak in His name, where do we go from there?

Mr. Armstrong died in 1986. If we also believe that God would not lie when He promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church (Matthew 16:18), how will we identify a legitimate remnant who is carrying on today (Isaiah 1:9; 37:31–32; Zephaniah 3:13; Matthew 24:45–46; Romans 11:4–5)?

### **Is He Truly Ordained of God?**

The first criteria of any legitimate remnant is having a leader who can trace his ordination to a legitimate origin. In spite of so many of God's people today who have rejected the faith once delivered on the topic of church government, the process for becoming a true minister to represent Jesus Christ is quite clear. No man can take that authority to himself. Jesus Christ specifically selects those who will represent Him. It is a false Protestant concept that any true "Christian" can go out and begin "a ministry" and do God's work. Jesus Christ said quite the opposite:

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) [emphasis mine].

God also contrasted His authorized agents from those who have presumed to do a work in His name without proper authority:

The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied (Jeremiah 23:20–21).

We understand that any man or organization has the right to determine who will represent him. We would never allow someone to assume the right to speak for us when we did not authorize it, would we? No, you and I are quite protective about who we trust to represent our interests. Does it make sense to believe Jesus Christ is any less careful? Do we really think any Tom, Dick, or Harry off the street is OK to make himself a minister and

go out to represent Christ? Notice this example of the severe consequences which can occur from such bald-faced presumption:

Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded (Acts 19:13–16).

God made a very explicit example out of these pretenders. They had no authority to act in the name of Jesus Christ because they had never been commissioned through a legitimate process. What is that process? Ordination through the laying on of hands! Jesus Christ personally ordained those men who were to become apostles and be sent out to raise up the true Church. There were no apostles except for those whom Christ specifically appointed Himself. There were the Twelve whom Christ called and appointed during His own ministry, there was the replacement for Judas Iscariot through the casting of lots to confirm Christ's specific appointment—not man's (Acts 1:26), and there was the appointment of Paul, likewise directly by Jesus Christ in the Spirit—not by man (Galatians 1:15–17).

The Bible does not clarify the specifics of how Christ conducted that ordination process for those apostles. We cannot therefore conclude with certainty that He did so by the laying on of His own hands in an ordination ceremony, but given the many other examples in the Bible of this procedure, it is certainly very likely. Even as the ordination process for Paul as an apostle is not specifically recorded, we have no doubt he was "ordained" to that office by Christ (1 Timothy 2:7). Likewise, as already stated, we are presuming in the letter the acceptance of Herbert Armstrong as a legitimate apostle. The question is, how are any other men—besides apostles—confirmed into their offices? For that, we have very definite instructions and examples given to certify God's expectations.

### **Laying on of Hands**

One of the most significant authorities granted to those apostles by God was the process of inducting newly called members into the Body of Christ. All baptisms must be conducted with the laying on of hands to be legitimate.

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy [Spirit]. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy [Spirit]

was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy [Spirit] (Acts 8:17–19).

The only way for any other man—besides an apostle—to have this authority to baptize is if he himself has been ordained through a legitimate delegation order from an apostle (*Monthly Letter*, June 2001). All other men who were called to become ministers were appointed under the authority of one of the apostles. It was to each apostle that a jurisdiction was assigned by God to work to raise up churches. All other ministers derived their authority as *delegated helpers* of those apostles. There is no evidence that a separate work during the New Testament Church era was raised up under a "non-apostle." Notice confirmation of the purpose for all other ministerial ordinations:

Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. . . . Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, . . . Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. . . . That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy [Spirit] which dwelleth in us (2 Timothy 1:6, 9, 11, 13–14).

To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee (Titus 1:4–5).

So Paul appointed Timothy and Titus to become his delegated representatives. Titus was instructed to ordain other men to become his helpers in local jurisdictions. Timothy was likewise instructed concerning the selection of local elders for ordination: 1 Timothy 3:10; 5:22. But all such men—ordained either directly by the apostle himself or by one of those men later ordained by an apostle, like Timothy and Titus—fall under the jurisdiction assigned by Jesus Christ to the original apostle. It is a chain of delegation for the purpose of fulfilling that single mission.

### **A Last-day Apostolic Work**

Why is this principle important? It confirms the very fundamental requirement which must be true as much today for the Church as it was in the first century. There is only one apostle which we recognize in this age as having been raised up by God, and that is Mr. Herbert Armstrong. He is the only one who taught that complete plan of salvation from the

Bible which we have come to accept as the revelation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, for any other men to hold legitimate claims to be true ministers of Jesus Christ today, they must have been ordained either directly by Mr. Armstrong, or through one of those men who themselves were ordained by Mr. Armstrong.

To begin with, let us state that no ordinations made by any other churches outside of the Radio Church of God (which later became the Worldwide Church of God) are legitimate, even if they were "Sabbath-keeping" groups. There are a number of groups which choose to worship on Saturday, but that does not make them a true work of God. Many churches possess "some" of the Truth. In fact, all churches in this world teach *some* elements of truth. That is not the hallmark of God's work, but of Satan's. It is Satan who has always mixed some truth with his gross errors in order to make the lie more believable. If a man had been ordained as a minister in another church—a false church like any of the Sunday-keeping groups or even the Seventh Day Adventist Church—before being called to the real Truth, Mr. Armstrong never accepted that ordination as being from God. One cannot carry a former false ordination into the true Church of God. God was never behind that ordination. Such a man must renounce his claim to any authority as a teacher if he is sincere about embracing the real Truth.

We have seen individuals in the past for whom this has been a real stumbling block. Having been a pastor or teacher in a former church, it is sometimes hard to give up the idea of that office, and some have actually aborted their entrance into the true church after they discovered their ministerial credentials would not be accepted.

But among those groups existing today which *did indeed* come out of our parent organization, what about the ordinations of their ministers? Are they legitimate? Again, if those men can trace their ordinations back to Mr. Armstrong, then we would accept that they have passed this first-level criteria test. (Just recognize that this is only *the first* of several tests we are covering to complete the *full formula* for identifying all imposters and pretenders.) An example would be a man who was ordained by Mr. Armstrong while in the parent body, but then separated and began ministering to his own group (for whatever reason). His ordination is not annulled, just because he is no longer with the original body. He still carries legitimate authority to be a minister. The ordination of God is for life. The same is true of any man ordained by that minister—whether while he was still in the parent body or even once he is separated—if that man's own ordination included the power to ordain others. A deacon (one ordained to manage physical duties of service for the church) does not have the authority to baptize or to anoint, and he certainly does not have the authority to ordain any others. Only one who was ordained with these "full spiritual powers" is in a position to ordain other men, even as Timothy and Titus were given by Paul.

Therefore, if a particular man was ordained by a man who was ordained by a man who was ordained by Mr. Armstrong, and each man in that linkage had the full legitimacy to ordain others, then he has passed our first intrinsic test. But if that is not true, the man has no right to be speaking in the name of Christ or acting as a teacher. This is the first acid test which can be applied to all of those claiming authority of Jesus Christ today. Therefore, any man who was never ordained in this manner, and only appointed himself as a teacher (based on a claim of divine calling or whatever it may be) is automatically eliminated. Likewise, any man who was ordained by someone who lacked *real authority* to ordain in the name of Jesus Christ is eliminated as well.

But there are many men today who pass this particular test. We have culled only a small percentage of the ones out there claiming to carry the banner of Mr. Armstrong. Yet these remaining men still disagree with each other and contend one against the other. What then is the next test we should administer?

### **Glory to God or to Man?**

The next test is one which Jesus Christ gave by His own example. Here is what He stated as a test of His own legitimacy:

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true (John 5:30–31).

He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him (John 7:18).

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works (John 14:10).

Therefore, the next test we should administer to any group leader claiming authority of Jesus Christ is this: What is his true motivation for doing what he is doing? Is he simply making a good living off of his religion? Is he leading a group to satiate his desire for personal attention and the accolades of others? Is he using his position to advance new doctrinal teachings which he claims as his own new inspiration from God, especially those which contradict past church teachings? Who gets the real glory for his work: God or himself?

Evaluate the history of each minister. When did he come into the church, and when was he ordained? What did he accept and teach doctrinally at that time? When did he finally separate from the parent organization (if he was ever a member), and why did he leave? Many stayed as long as they could to protect their positions and their salaries. In spite of the perversion of God's truth, they held their peace and supported the new party line, for a time trading their conscience for physical security. Only when things in the parent body became bad enough that a critical mass of brethren were unwilling to accept more changes, these men stepped out "boldly" to defend the faith, starting their own groups to "preserve the truth." How convenient to wait until they could count upon enough members to follow them to provide a source of income to keep them in the standard of living to which they had become accustomed, and a following significant enough to preserve their sense of self-importance.

Examine the history of these new groups—what they teach and how they behave. By their words and their actions, is God really getting all of the glory, or are decisions being made which seek to spotlight the man as something special? Do not be fooled by outward statements of self-deprecation or honor for God. Talk is cheap. Look beyond the surface and examine what the deeper message of that ministry is really all about. What is its real motivation and conviction based upon the history of its formation and its progress over time? Are you seeing a work which seeks to build up a man as something special, or is it a work which is truly pointing to God and encouraging the flock to build faith in Jesus Christ alone? What might likely happen if the leader of that group died? Is the whole basis of unity in that group predicated upon a man, or is there substance beyond the personality of one or more human beings?

Applying this second acid test should help cull quite a few more claimants of authority in these last days. Some of the past actions of these men tell the story very plainly—what they really care about, and why they are doing what they are doing. Yet, in other cases it may be hard to verify for sure. You may not be able to confirm from available documentation what a man's real motivation has been. You may be suspicious but have to keep him on the short list of possible servants who are legitimate because there is no iron-clad evidence otherwise. In that case, where do we go from here?

### **What Are They Teaching?**

As we showed in our evaluation of prophets specifically, so is it true for all ministers. The ultimate test of legitimacy is what they are teaching as *the Truth*. As we have demonstrated in many other of our writings, this criteria applies to *all* ministers, including apostles.

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 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. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6–9) [emphasis mine].

Paul was an apostle. Yet he said that not even he himself (by saying "though we," making himself included in this test) had the authority to change *anything* which God had revealed to the Church through him. However, this is the single most critical principle which most of God's people today have still not fathomed. They grasp that Moses did not have the authority to tinker with the Ten Commandments just because God used him as the messenger to deliver those precepts to Israel. They grasp that the Twelve had no authority to amend or pervert anything that Jesus Christ had taught them during His three-year ministry. And they have the words of Paul through the Holy Spirit to show that it applies likewise to any apostle—like himself whom Christ taught in the Spirit in the Arabian desert for three years. The apostles never taught that they had authority to change doctrine and that God would back them up. Such idea violates the very essence of these works being inspired and founded upon Jesus Christ.

Yet, why then do many of these same brethren believe that Herbert Armstrong had the authority to make changes to the doctrines revealed by God through him, just because he was an apostle? It makes no sense at all. Yet that is exactly what many of these other groups profess and teach to their members today. They claim that Mr. Armstrong—being an apostle—had the authority to change doctrine and that God would back him up, only that no one else could do it. Therefore, they basically embraced all of the changed doctrines made in the Worldwide Church of God up until Mr. Armstrong died in 1986, but then refuse to accept any changes made by his successors.

How does that make any sense at all? It is an outright rejection of the very clear instructions given by Jesus Christ to the Church!

If any man will do his will, he shall *know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself*. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him (John 7:17–18) [emphasis mine].

Upon whom was this church founded, Herbert Armstrong or Jesus Christ? Those who claim Mr. Armstrong got some of his doctrines wrong in the early years because he was



never a true Bible scholar (doctrines like Monday Pentecost, divorce and remarriage, the nature of man, divine healing, etc.), are really saying they do not believe Jesus Christ was truly the foundation of that great work after all. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He never lies, and He never makes a mistake, even when He works through fallible human servants. By a miracle He has always made sure that the church (whether ancient Israel—the church in the wilderness—or the New Testament Church) has been founded upon *real Truth!*

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. . . . *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. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and *even as it hath taught you*, ye shall abide in him (1 John 2:21, 24–27) [emphasis mine].

So what is our third and most powerful test to distinguish the legitimate ministers from the perverse? Anyone who tells you that Mr. Armstrong or any other man had the authority to change what Christ revealed is lying. He should be rejected. Anyone who is justifying repudiation of original doctrinal teachings under the guise of "better scholarship" is denying that Christ is the foundation.

But did we not just prove that many of them still have a very valid ordination? Even if they have changed some of the teachings, are we not approved in attending their worship services, and will not God honor our spiritual offerings made in those convocations? Again, let Jesus Christ Himself clarify the principle:

Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not (Matthew 23:1–3).

Christ is certifying that those scribes and Pharisees did indeed have a right to the offices they held, being legitimate leaders of the nation. They were not illegitimate usurpers. Those offices must be respected (even the office which Satan holds today is a God-given position and requires our respect; Jude 9–10). But He warned this did not mean the people were to follow all that they did, because they were not holding fast to God's Truth at all, being hypocrites.

*If any man teach otherwise* [no matter who he is], and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and *destitute of the truth*, supposing that gain is godliness: *from such withdraw thyself* (1 Timothy 6:3–5) [emphasis mine].

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

Someone within Israel (the church) is sponsoring Sabbath and Holy Day convocations which God will not honor, and in fact which He hates.

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 (Isaiah 1:11–15).

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols (Amos 5:21–23).

Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not spoken?

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord GOD (Ezekiel 13:3–8).

God did not reject the offerings of His people because the priests and prophets were not legitimate office-holders. No, he rejected their offerings because those leaders had perverted the commands of God and had begun to teach their own concepts. There is no way to fulfill the command to keep Sabbaths and Holy Days in the midst of those groups which have rejected God's divine revelation and turned to doctrines based upon the wisdom of human scholars. What they claim as the product of "growing in grace and knowledge," God calls the rejection of His very revelation.

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 out of his place, except thou repent (Revelation 2:5).

### **What About Church of God, The Eternal?**

How then does Church of God, The Eternal answer this question about our justification for being a group and claiming the authority of Jesus Christ? How do we answer those who would test our own legitimacy? Can we pass the three-part test just enunciated? You be the judge:

This group was formed in 1975 under the direction of Mr. Raymond Cole, who was one of the first four students in Ambassador College when it began in 1947. He had been taught directly by Mr. Armstrong since he was a boy, and learned firsthand what Mr. Armstrong taught as the revelation of Jesus Christ. (He also understood the difference between doctrine and prophecy. Mr. Armstrong was not a prophet, as he acknowledged himself, but he vehemently claimed that Jesus Christ revealed to him the knowledge of right and wrong, the master plan for man's salvation, and what was required of the Church to please God.) Mr. Cole accepted that Mr. Armstrong was speaking in the name of Jesus Christ, and believed that those doctrinal teachings came from God, not man. Mr. Armstrong ordained him as an evangelist in 1952.

Mr. Cole proved this was his true belief when it was put to the ultimate test between 1972–74 (for details, please refer to Mr. Cole's open letter, entitled, *Church of God, The Eternal—Who We Are*). Mr. Armstrong came under severe pressure from his son and other high-ranking ministers to change fundamental doctrines. He resisted those changes vociferously for a long time, but eventually gave in to them in 1974. From that time forward, in spite of asserting forcefully that Jesus Christ had revealed these things to Him, even as He had done with the Apostle Paul, he capitulated and accepted the technical postulations of

human scholars, claiming that God bound any changes he made because he was an apostle. Raymond Cole knew that was a total repudiation of what he had taught over the past forty years, and that which Mr. Cole had accepted as the Truth of God. In spite of his continuing respect for Mr. Armstrong, who had been like a father to him, he had to put God first.

Being forced to either support and teach those changes or else be stripped of his long-held position and benefits as an evangelist, Mr. Cole refused to become a Balaam and compromise his spiritual convictions for personal security. At the end of 1974, becoming convinced that Raymond Cole would not "come around" in time—as did the other evangelists who likewise held severe reservations *initially* about those changes—the Worldwide Church of God put him out. Church of God, The Eternal formed as a remnant in early 1975 to serve other scattered sheep who were likewise forced out because they could not accept those doctrinal changes.

Thirty-three years later, in 2008, this group is still teaching the very same body of doctrine which we had all first accepted, and which was practiced by *the entire church* for nearly forty years prior to 1974—*the faith once delivered*. Mr. Cole died seven years ago, in September 2001. Over that time, this body has continued to uphold and defend those very same teachings. Neither Mr. Cole nor the current Pastor (this writer, ordained by Mr. Cole in 1997) has ever claimed authority as an apostle, and has never advanced "new doctrines" to repudiate our former beliefs. We do not claim to have prophetic gifts, and we do not attempt to entice brethren to look to us for their salvation. We have no pride of ownership in anything we are teaching. God did not use us as an instrument to reveal that Truth—the work of an apostle. No, Mr. Cole learned all of those doctrines from Mr. Armstrong, the same as did the entire church. We have nothing new to offer to draw attention to ourselves. After Mr. Cole's death, rather than disintegrate as many other groups have done, we have not only remained strong, but increased in stability and viability, proving that our members were never here to participate in a personality cult. We are a continuing body because we all share a sincere belief in the truth God gave the Church by divine revelation through Herbert Armstrong.

All of the above statements can be verified, for anyone who would like further documentation.

We do not claim to be the only faithful remnant. We do not know if there might be another organized group somewhere on this earth which has likewise refused to bow the knee to Baal. Perhaps there is. But if so, it will meet the criteria outlined above.

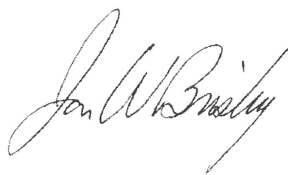
And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us (Luke 9:49–50).

If that miracle was legitimate, and not a fake, the man might have been approved of Christ. The test however is whether he was holding to the real Truth—the Word personified by Jesus Christ. If so, there must have been other proofs of his legitimacy as well, like being commissioned by Christ Himself, not being an usurper. No usurper will be backed up by the power of God's true Spirit.

We need not try to make ourselves the "only ones." Maybe we are, maybe not. It is not important for us to assert it one way or another. We simply know that all other groups *we are aware of* do not pass the Biblical tests listed above which we hold dear. We do not attempt to put a fence around ourselves, but we do put a fence around *The Truth*. Holding that Truth is always the real proof of legitimacy.

Dear brethren, God helping us, we will continue preserving those fundamental teachings revealed by Jesus Christ in this age which began over seventy years ago. We love them, and we are committed to serving and supporting all of those who likewise cherish those eternal principles which define our hope of salvation in the soon-coming Kingdom of God.

Your humble servant in Christ Jesus,

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

Jon W. Brisby