

Church of God, The Eternal

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February 1, 1978

Greetings Brethren:

Today is a very nice, comfortable day here in Oregon. What a relief from the incessant rain — precipitation completely beyond the normal for the area. But, we are cognizant of what other areas of the country, as well as the world, are receiving. The weather is, to some degree, unprecedented.

We do not intend to dramatize any such natural conditions, but it is imperative that every servant of God keep his eyes wide open to these occurrences. One thing is quite obvious: A return to what we recall as normalcy is elusive. The weather pendulum is erratic, swinging from one extreme to the other on a rather regular basis.

The weather is bad — who can deny that? But of even greater significance is the erratic and confusing picture of world economy, with special emphasis upon what is happening here in the United States. One thing is certain: Every responsible individual had better have his economic house in order. Such advice is not our province, but there is ample instruction — instruction that is basic and sound, not the wild utterances of dramatists — available to any who care to study it. Further, profound economic advice is found in the Bible. If we would apply those principles, we would be equipped, both physically and spiritually, to weather the violent storms of these last days.

Though the purpose of this monthly letter is not to rehearse conditions of the last days, let me call to your attention the volatile situation developing in the Mideast. Some form of peace initiative is mandatory for leaders devoid of the spiritual knowledge which we possess, but know this: Every such effort only increases the ultimate explosiveness of that time bomb. Even if a peace accord is reached, it is at best temporary. And, even if from the national vantage point of those directly involved, the failure to achieve a lasting peace cannot help but produce the most outraged, violent and resentful behavior. The clash of emotions will be unprecedented.

We may not have been given any specific knowledge of times and circumstances, relative to last-day prophecies. However, we should read them and understand their general application. There are general facts which we are required to understand, and we should watch for their fulfillment. We will know the certainty of them when they come to pass. Read

them and watch. Do not attempt to interpret dates or specific events in advance. That responsibility belongs to God alone.

For this month, the subject of love — proof of our love to God — will be covered. The subject of love itself is so broad that it should be divided into three parts: a) God's love to mankind, b) our love to God and c) man's love for man.

After a thorough and exhaustive study of the whole subject, I feel you will be surprised at the dimensions of the subject covered this month. I hope that, with the much-needed help of God, I can make the subject plain.

To set the stage, let us reflect, momentarily, upon the type of our relationship with Christ and God the Father. The spiritual principle will emerge more clearly by grasping the physical type — physical marriage is that type. We are called to become a part of the Body which comprises the affianced Bride of Christ. That Christ is the same one who was married to the Church in the wilderness — in Old Testament times. Because of her unfaithfulness, adulteries and rebellion, He gave her a bill of divorcement. Then, in the process of time — as prophetically determined by God — He (Christ) had to die in order to break the bonds of that marriage. This time, that same wife — energized, changed in character and purpose by the power of the Holy Spirit — will have made herself ready (Rev. 19:7). Every one called of God and prepared — by overcoming and the development of real spiritual character — will be a part of that new bride. The begetting to that new purpose and character was at the time of our call, conversion and baptism. It was at that time the purposes of the husband (Christ) were made known to us (the bride). From that time, the qualifying performance begins. To qualify, we must learn to be absolutely faithful — that is, loyal and consistent to those revealed purposes. The Old Testament wife — of the flesh — failed because of a lack of faith. We, as a part of the New Testament bride-to-be, are evidencing our desire to be a true wife by our faithful obedience to the revealed way of life. Those purposes cannot be changed by the wife. She is to be the obedient one.

All this has much to do with love — our subject for this letter. And real love, or the lack of it, is the premise of our unusual troubles today (Matt. 24:12). Further, the affliction of ancient Israel, our type and example, is buffeting us today because we are unaware of just what is required or are unmindful of the need. Let us proceed to the subject — from time to time reaching back to the type, as an example from which to draw certain corollaries. Keep in mind the physical marriage, as a type. It will enable us to understand the spiritual.

I. Who, Only, Can Love God?

Christ said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world,

therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant [in this case, the wife] is not greater than his lord [Christ, the husband]. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying [the Word sent by God], they will keep your's [the revealed Word as sent by God and Christ] also" (John 15:19-20).

Again, Christ said, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:24-26).

Paul was inspired to write, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4).

And Paul continues, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us . . . quickened us together with Christ" (Eph. 2:4-5).

It is obvious, those who love (and grow in that love) are called of God. For, those called and chosen are selected to become the Bride of Christ. Under acceptable circumstances, the husband selects his bride-to-be. In the case of the marriage of Christ and the Church, God the Father has a great part in this selection. The part played by the Father comes from a motive of optimum love and concern for the Son. Together they select, groom and qualify the wife — the Church.

The important point to remember is this: The wife is chosen, selected by the groom. As John stated it, ". . . I have chosen you out of the world . . ." (John 15:19). Those chosen of God and Christ are to come out of the world — the natural love of all mankind. They must come to appreciate total obedience — obedience to the will and purpose of God and Christ — the purpose which can be understood only by those to whom it is revealed. At that time, there is a begettal — baptism — which begins the "quickening" process (the spiritual change) in our lives. Then begins the crucial test. Do we possess the character, vision, faith and determination to be faithful until the time of the wedding, at the return of Christ? Let us remember, Christ will not again marry a wife of natural inclinations — the inclinations to rebel, grow tired of obedience, change in character or just plain become indifferent. Jesus, the future husband, said it all when He said, ". . . If ye continue in my word [instructions to the future bride], THEN are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

Ancient Israel, the wife of the one who became the Christ, received the Truth of God and jubilantly agreed to the marriage contract — but could not be faithful. That is, Israel was soon confronted with the realities of life. At that time, the people desired to effect changes, doing that which seemed right to them. In general, they grew weary of performing the duties of a wife. That was the one and only fault of the Old Covenant (Heb. 8:7-8). The nature of the wife was that of the flesh — selfish, rebellious and indifferent. It is that fault which must be corrected before the second marriage takes place.

We have been chosen as the future bride, given the instructions of life (obedience) and subjected to the trials of that life for this reason: It is in order that we may qualify, by purpose and dedication, for the glorious responsibility of becoming the wife of Christ at His second coming.

Who, then, can really love God and His Son Christ? Only those who are chosen and endure the trials of the necessary qualifying requirements established by Christ. The mere knowledge of Christ is woefully inadequate. For, it is only those who endure the trials of their faith and confidence unto the end.

II. What Is the Basis of God's Call?

In I John 4:19 we read, "We love him, because he first loved us." But why did He first love us? What had we done to merit such consideration? The answer, strangely, is that we did not merit such a call. Perhaps, the selection of His wife initially — in Old Testament times — might give us some clues.

Moses wrote, "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people . . . But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers . . ." (Deut. 7:7-8).

He (Moses) also said, "Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day" (Deut. 10:14-15).

One thing is obvious. God did not choose Israel or the Church today for any physical reasons, supremacy or numbers. He chose Israel because of His own personal commitment to them. Therefore, since what happened to Israel is a type for us today (Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10), we can conclude God had very specific reasons for making His present choices. They are not physical in nature — stature, wealth, education or whatever. Those reasons involve the heart and character — not personal greatness or self-esteem.

With respect to servant selection, nowhere in the Bible does God give His specific reasons for actions taken. But we can safely employ the principles enumerated throughout the Bible. In that sense, His purposes would revolve around heart and mind. See I Corinthians 2. The story is pretty well told in that chapter, alone.

For whatever the reasons, God did set His love upon those whom He chose. From that premise, He will do much to see His chosen become successful (Ph'p. 1:6; Eph. 2:10; Job 14:15). Success is measured by the mastery of self and being born into the divine family.

As a result of that great love for the people (who were to be chosen and given opportunity at specified times), God willingly gave the life of His own Son. This was the supreme sacrifice for undeserving man. Now, considering the magnitude of His sacrifice, what level of love does God require of us?

III. What Level of Love Does God Require of Us?

God so loved the world that He gave His Son to become a supreme sacrifice for us. That surely is the epitome of love and compassion. That One who became the sacrifice was Christ, the future husband of a spiritually energized wife. Is it conceivable that He would accept a lesser degree of love and respect from His future bride? All reason shouts, NO!

Again, let us turn to the physical type. Moses was inspired by the Spirit of God to write, "And now, Israel [the wife, already], what doth the Lord thy God [the husband] require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes . . . for thy good?" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13.) Compare with Deuteronomy 6:5. We are again instructed to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and might. Further, let us read Deuteronomy 30:6, a long-range prophecy looking forward to some future time — a time when, by circumstance, experience and punishment, there will be a change of heart and mind. Moses wrote, "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

To love God wholeheartedly does not come naturally. It must be given to us. More about this requirement, later.

We have seen the instructions of God, relative to the Old Covenant marriage. Are there comparable instructions related to the New Covenant marriage and the engagement time (II Cor. 11:2) prior to the actual marriage? Indeed, there are.

When asked what the great commandment was, Jesus said, ". . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." So significant is this basic requirement, that other gospel writers were inspired to repeat it. Mark wrote, "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment" (Mark 12:29-30). Note also verse 33. And Luke wrote, ". . . Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law [five books of Moses]? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind . . ." (Luke 10:25-27).

Divided allegiance is totally unacceptable to God. In such circumstances, love to God is only feigned. The actual love is for self and the world. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon [the whole natural way and its product, the world]" (Matt. 6:24).

We must come to abhor the self and its aspirations. We cannot trust the self. And the self is well defined in God's Word (Gal. 5:19-21; I Cor. 6:9-10; Col. 3:5-9).

Are we moved by the tenderness, compassion and purpose of the Word of God — personified in the life of Christ? Do we want the nature, character, perfection of God more than anything on this earth? What God is offering us is so overwhelming and awesome that it cannot be given to any but those who understand, love, honor and appreciate that gift. We are presently on trial — a trial for our lives. Will we grow weary in the endeavor which God initiated by the call which He gave to us? Can, or will, we be faithful? Will we grow ever more perfect in obedience and responsiveness? The wife who has made herself ready for the marriage at the return of Christ, has sacrificed all for the glory of being born into the divine family and becoming the recipient of the glory of her husband, Christ.

As an espoused wife-to-be, we, as the Church of God and Christ, are readying [purifying — I John 3:1-3] ourselves to be a perfect mate to Christ. If we can keep this awesome purpose and reward in mind, we all can weather the storms and doubts which assail us daily.

How deeply do we love God? For what reason would any one of us reject Christ and turn to selfish or worldly purposes? What love God has bestowed, even at this time, upon us — that we see and understand what is happening! Our eyes have not been darkened. We have been given the

courage to remain faithful — up to this point. Will any one of us yet falter and fail? A thousand times "no" — if we will keep our eyes fixed upon the goal and refuse to be swayed by self, the world or Satan. God has loved, and continues to love, all of us intensely. Will we respond with like love — love which encompasses heart, mind, soul and strength?

Here is yet another area which manifests the awesome love of God. He knows our frame — our nature. He knows we are incapable of such love. But He has an intense desire to see us make it through — to be completely successful! How, if we are unable of ourselves to evidence such love?

IV. God's Love Not Natural — Must Be Given

In writing to the Romans, Paul said, "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost [Spirit], which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). He wrote to the churches in Galatia, ". . . the fruit of the Spirit is love . . ." (Gal. 5:22). Further, he informed Timothy, ". . . God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Tim. 1:7).

John wrote, ". . . If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (I John 4:12-13).

The scope, extent, awesomeness and depth of God's love is such that it is incomprehensible to man. It must be given. Then, when it is present, it will manifest itself in exactly the same way Jesus Christ did when in the flesh. He was the epitome of God's love. He was love personified. God is love. Jesus Christ was the express image of the Father. Take time to review the life of Christ — with the subject of love in mind. You will be utterly amazed. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, Christ lives in us. And by the presence of that life in us, we live exactly as Christ did. What an awesome plan and purpose of God! How overwhelming and incomprehensible! And how far above the petty bickering, arrogance, conceit, vanity and selfishness of man. He gave up all for you and me. Can we give up all — all of absolute nothingness — for Him? Then, and then only, can we be the affianced Bride of Christ!

Such a concept is hard for human beings to accept! We are noted for our questions, second-guessing and "yes, but's"! We want to ascertain for ourselves — "scholarship." Faith is a most elusive trait. And second to it is simplicity.

How is it possible for human beings to come to really love God? And who will love God the most fervently?

V. Who Will Love God Most?

On one occasion, after Christ had manifested deep love, forgiveness and concern, a certain Pharisee had a few thoughts of hardness and self-righteousness. He did not say anything, but he apparently was unaware Jesus Christ could read minds and hearts. Immediately, Jesus seized the opportunity to teach the Pharisee. He called him and said (in effect), "I have a few things to say to you." As was His custom, Christ used a parable to teach the lesson. On this occasion He used the example of two men who were debtors to the same creditor. The one owed ten times as much as the other. On the due date, neither had sufficient money to pay the indebtedness. Out of compassion, the creditor forgave (absolved the indebtedness) of both. Then Jesus asked Simon, ". . . which of them will love him most?" (Luke 7:42.) Simon rightly judged when he said, ". . . I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. . . ." (verse 43). Read the whole story in Luke 7:36-50.

We all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We are guilty. But, the very essence of Christ's statements seems to imply those who have lived relatively clean and pure lives — in their own eyes — have considerable difficulty recognizing the depth and gravity of their own error. While, on the contrary, those who have really sinned — lived unacceptable lives even in society — have much less difficulty accepting what they are and truly repenting of their wrong. These are most grateful for the mercy and love of God. Usually, those who have lived such lives and do intensely repent, manifest the depth of their change in their daily lives — in attitude and mind. They are more humble and grateful. As Christ said, they love Him the most.

In no way is the above a justification for sin. It is recorded for one basic reason. Those who have done their own thing — caring little for God or His purpose — are the ones who, once called, really repent and manifest the love and affection so necessary for receiving the promises of God. It certainly is not recorded to condone a vile lifestyle while superficially leaving the image of a different purpose. Such deception and hypocrisy are strongly denounced by God.

In the final analysis, can we see the depth of our own wrong? Can we recognize the gravity of our sin? If so, we can love God the MOST. If not, we will ridicule and condemn others. Such behavior is a satanic play to take the heat of wrong from our consciousness. But we are told by God to squarely stand before the mirror of God's Law and act upon it. If we will do this, we will have no time to meddle in the responsibilities of others. Also, the brilliant illumination of our own wrong will subdue (humble) us and make us much more grateful for mercy, tolerance and kindness.

The love and obedience mentioned here must come from the heart. It cannot be the mechanics of flesh. It is not by word but by action and attitude.

VI. Physical Obedience Is Insufficient!

In Luke 11:42 we read, ". . . ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

Christ was pinpointing the problem of the self-righteous Pharisees. They could see obedience to the letter — fleshly obedience — a form of yardstick religion. But they were unwilling to recognize the spiritual dimension.

Many people today go through a form of physical obedience, but in words they do deny Christ. Real obedience must come from the heart — out of the very source from whence evil and wrong proceed from those uncalled and unconverted. Living the real Truth of God is, indeed, a recrudescence of the heart, mind and spirit. It is the manifestation of genuineness and sincerity. The manifestation is in the flesh, the letter. Letter obedience is mandatory, of course. There is no way to keep the spiritual intent of any law and at the same time break the letter of that law. The premise of obedience is the letter. But that physical obedience is inadequate. Obedience now must come from the heart — the emotions and intents.

Therefore, love for God — obedience to His way, as defined by the Word — must come from the heart, the very emotions of one's being. This is precisely what Christ requires of us before we will be accepted as His future bride.

Time is indeed short — much shorter than when we first believed. Now is the time for all of us to make our calling and election sure. We must purify ourselves and make ourselves ready for His second coming. We know some will. Let us all be a part of that group who overcome and shall hear the exciting words of Jesus Christ, ". . . Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things [what God revealed and gave to us], I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21).

The remainder of this subject (our love to God) will be written for the next one or two monthly letters. There is so much more to the subject.

Just a comment, before closing, about the forthcoming articles. We will be sending, along with our newest article, the revised copy of one

which most of you received earlier. It is our desire to continually improve this service and to fill the needs as they arise. Please feel free to communicate to us your specific needs or to request any other current material which may be available.

Our prayers and thoughts are always with you. We do love and respect you all highly. Keep up your courage and conviction.

In deep Christian

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Raymond C. Cole