

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

With the advent of March, comes renewed hope and life to those troubled by the perils of winter. The anticipation? Spring cannot be far removed. And with spring comes the hope of more beneficent circumstances and conditions. Truly, hope springs eternal.

But, with the vicissitudes of time comes also the realization that the return of Christ nears. Every passing day is just one less day before the literal fulfillment of that glorious event. The Christian's prayer, "Lord, thy kingdom come, thy will be done in the earth as it is in heaven." The fervency, imminency and urgency of that prayer have been greatly augmented by the trials and conditions of the past. Yet, with such urgency and desire come their attendant pitfalls. These pitfalls are not inherent. They are the results of our own defective, carnal natures — natures which compel us, at times, to establish all physical criteria related to the fulfillment of that expectation. For instance, if Christ, and/or God, does not answer our prayers when we feel He should, some are prone to doubt, lose confidence, turn bitter, change conviction or what have you. We seem to lack the necessary conviction to believe to the end — regardless of the conditions or circumstances. After all, the veracity of God's Word stands beyond doubt or the need of human rationalization. We must learn to take it at face value and trust God with the outcome. Remember, if it is God's will, it is never too late for Him to intervene, regardless of the physical factors involved. Our responsibility is to simply and honestly ask what God requires of us — each of us, individually. If we are possessors of such confidence and conviction, the physical circumstances count for little. We walk by faith, not by sight. Faith is the absolute evidence of things which we have not seen. If all of God's chosen people had had such confidence, faith and conviction, a wild departure from the Truth would have been impossible.

In retrospect, what are the unique lessons which we should have learned from the past experiences? Experiences are of little value if we do not indelibly learn the God-intended lessons. By carefully evaluating our trials, we can avoid many of the more damaging attitudes and physical conditions which blight thousands of God's chosen people.

Remember, the lessons are of value only if you look at the self. Critically evaluate yourself — not your neighbor.

Having known many people before the recent difficulties, seeing them pass through those trials and finally being afforded the opportunity to observe present attitudes, I can personally categorize a dozen different mental configurations which have imperilled and brought into servitude and bondage large numbers of people.

Test yourselves! Where do you stand? Will your present attitude lead you to happiness and fulfillment of life? Or, will your outlook unmercifully destroy you — NOW and in the future?

Be careful! How you evaluate yourself may mean the difference between death and life! Honesty pays handsome dividends — but only if we aggressively act on the knowledge gained by a careful and judicious evaluation.

The setting for this evaluation ought to be the concise but penetrating statement of Jesus Christ, ". . . he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13). Endure what? These very pressures, trials of emotion and doubt, mentioned above. We need to understand them — and carefully evaluate their impact on our lives. No one is immune to negative reactions. Such feelings and doubts are mastered by conscious effort and purpose.

What, then, are the trials and pressures which we all must endure, for the sake of salvation? They will be numerically listed and briefly explained. Sermons could be delivered on each point. But this letter is not the place to elaborate. We want to see them succinctly categorized.

1. Do not become weary in well doing. Note Galatians 6:9. We must maintain faith — conviction. We must know — not live in doubt. By faithfulness to conviction (our original love and respect for the Truth), we can endure all trials and hardships.

Once hope is lost, the effort to persevere wanes. And with the loss of purpose and determination, it is just one short step to giving up totally. Then, imagine the agony of a sudden realization that to have persevered just a little longer would have brought victory. For Paul was inspired to write, ". . . in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9).

2. Do not faint in adversity. See Proverbs 24:10. Turn adversity and difficulty into avenues of spiritual success. For those whose hearts and minds are fixed on God, trial and adversity are opportunities for self-evaluation — netting a closer walk with God. Our success is dependent upon the attitude assumed. Count such opportunities as blessings. Find joy in them. If we succumb to adversity, our

mental orientation and determination are defective. If we positively respond to such tests and acts of correction, we will be greatly strengthened. We will realize the value of our experiences. We will be enhanced, not deterred, in our pursuit of life.

3. Do not become spiritually blinded. Read and study Proverbs 29:18. God will open our eyes to understand His way but once. At the time of that call, we are endowed with a fresh flush of enthusiasm, the excitement of first love.

Once that excitement is thwarted by a host of circumstances, our thoughts turn inward. We become agitated. We feed on rancor and hate. Our spirit and attitude are unforgiving. Then — because we equate truth with those who propound it — if the teachers are questioned, the truth becomes tainted at the same time. As time moves along, the contempt grows deeper and the truth is rejected. One principle alone must be understood: Character, or lack of it, neither substantiates nor destroys truth. God's Truth will always be truth. And we must not blind ourselves to it because of any human being or organization.

Most do not make categorical moves. A departure usually occurs one step at a time. Once an initial compromising step is taken, it is much easier to take the second, then the third, etc. And when we have allowed such departures to transpire, it is absolutely impossible for us to realize where we are, what we are doing, unless we can separate ourselves from the total involvement (all critical conditions, circumstances and relationships) and take an unbiased, objective look at our thoughts, ways, beliefs and patterns of life. To accomplish this feat, the question "Why?" must be asked frequently. Then do not accept generalized answers. Demand proof from yourself. Most will be surprised, if they are honest and candid! You cannot long hide from the searchlight of reality!

Remember, those who are spiritually blind do not know it. Real orientation first requires admissions.

4. Do not allow the cares of the world to destroy you. Physical pursuits have become a mania to many today. In itself, the development and usage of one's latent capability is not wrong. But, because of unusual sacrifices in the past, deprivations of many types and shattered confidences subsequently, many have lost all perspective and are now approaching life with complete spiritual abandonment. The hue and cry: "Never again will I be self-

sacrificing and subservient. I intend to serve myself for a while." This situation, once again, illustrates just how incapable most human beings are of handling freedoms and pressures.

All of us are, by circumstances, subservient. We are either subservient to self or obedient to God. But, many times the issue is emotionally clouded. Some are convinced serving the self is honoring God. Others are convinced obedience to God is bondage. In reality, serving God is true freedom — an escape from the bondage and servitude of self.

True spirituality is found in a balanced and properly oriented life — in establishing and living by priorities. Idolatry — serving self — is observed in our approach to life. If only we could remember the joys and enthusiasm which attended our pursuit of truth! We would never depart from that way. Objects of this life would have little meaning. Compare Matthew 6:24-34 and Matthew 13:22.

5. Do not lose your faith. A world of bewilderment. Confusion reigned. In this tidal wave of shattering experiences, most were looking for any island of safety. Any anchor of hope.

So little had been said about faith and the foundation of conviction. When the anchor of organization was shattered, individuals had no sense of direction. Each began to grasp for explanations and orientation — the fate of those who trusted not God, who could not adhere to their original convictions. Why? The anchor of their hope was faith in men, in organizations. Men are not to be trusted. But God's way will never change. Had we all had our faith in God, in His revealed way of life, we would not have been shattered by the storms and doubts which recently assailed our beliefs. Any other object of our trust, faith and conviction is destined to falter. If we place our confidence in the wrong thing, why should we hold God and Christ liable for our mistakes? God is worthy of our FAITH. His way is unalterable. Until we re-establish ourselves upon that perfect way, in confidence and assurance, we are destined to be beset by doubts, misgivings and agnosticism. God will be sure of you. Read and ponder, carefully, Hebrews 12:23-29.

6. Do not lose your direction because of others' imperfections. Carefully consider Matthew 24:12. God's way — His character — is not to be judged by the actions of men. Failure of men does not render useless and vile the Truth of God. What we accept as a matter of call, study, conviction and proof cannot be destroyed by imperfections of others. We judge human beings by the Word of God — by

His perfect, unalterable standard. We must not judge God's Truth by the mistakes of human beings. Yet, this is precisely what God's chosen are doing! The continuation of this reasoning is manifested in a host of recent publications, in an aggressive effort to repudiate the character of God's servant from the beginning. Next, the Truth is repudiated by equating it with these human imperfections. Thus, the failure of men and organizations has destroyed faith in the TRUTH of God. How tragic! How subtle and surreptitious have been the antics of our archenemy, Satan the Devil.

Can God's chosen people ever regain their spiritual composure and confidence? Can we regain the solidarity of belief? Solidarity of faith and conviction founded upon the ROCK of Jesus Christ — so confident that the waves of doubt and turmoil will never affect us? See Matthew 7:24-29.

7. Do not allow personal arrogancy to destroy you. Truth is revealed. It is given to called and chosen instruments who are commissioned to preach it to others. Yet, many have assumed (after separating from the Church), to teach and mislead God's chosen people. Nearly every individual has become a law unto himself. Each has sidestepped obedience to God by a clever reading and twisting of Scripture to satisfy preconceived ideas — ideas which needed Biblical backing to appear respectable and acceptable to others. Above all, the author of the idea needed what appeared to be Scriptural backing, to avoid the natural crisis-of-conscience arising from the departure from previous belief.

Brethren, let us never be led into this deceptive and ruinous avenue. Either we had the Truth of God revealed to us initially, or we do not know what it is!

Because too many placed confidence in men and organizations, when they failed the offended parties were required to reconstruct their thoughts. If their faith and conviction had been in the Truth, it would never have changed. And the conflict of change, by others, would have been external to us and not internal — in our own minds.

Do not assume a special call from God. All of us were called — called to understand the Truth, which we accepted and practiced. We will not be exonerated, before God, by pointing our finger at others for imperfections when we are just as culpable before God for departing from the priceless possession which He gave to us. Can we be trusted with the pearl of great price? Or will we, because of our own personal arrogancy, settle for an artificial gem?

8. Do not allow contempt for the ministry to destroy you. As human beings, we are prone to categorize. We tend to classify people in groups, based on our own personal experiences. If a certain nationality has crossed us two or three times, all of that particular stock is arbitrarily classed for all times. If we like a particular group of people — perhaps classed by vocation — they are all good. Most of the time, we are far from objective.

In like manner, because of personal imperfections on the part of some ministers, all ministers become classified. The initial contempt has grown into virtual hate and hostility.

Many have used this distrust, contempt and outright hostility to justify a clean break from the Truth — the way of life — which they voluntarily accepted. In the times of distress, most are not objective and careful. Literally hundreds of natural questions are left unanswered — questions generated by thoughts and actions of traumatized people.

If every minister failed, that would not alter the veracity of Truth. God's way of life was given to ancient Israel. They categorically failed. Did that failure destroy or change God's Truth? No, indeed not! The same truth is what we are taught, but with one added ingredient — FAITH (Heb. 4:1-2). Do not use generalized conceptions to avoid obedience to God. It is the unalterable nature of God's way by which all people, including ministers, must be judged. Any broad generalization will not excuse you for failure to perform God-given responsibility. You must try and test.

Do not allow bitterness to well up inside you. Is your own personal destruction a just retribution for the failure of others? It doesn't make sense, does it? It makes more logical sense, for each of us to refuse to be spiritually injured because of others — whatever they may do.

9. Do not let family ties destroy you. Compare Luke 14: 26-27 and Luke 14:33. Inheritance of life is not predicated upon any particular relationship with family. The above texts amply demonstrate the necessity of totally subjugating all such relationships to our spiritual call. Yet, many have failed to make necessary decisions in their lives because of other family members. It is unusually easy to adjust our spiritual conceptions to harmonize with physical conditions. This is not acceptable with God. Truth is absolute. If we cannot, or will not, prove the eternal nature of Truth because of physical advantage, we fail miserably in one of the fundamental

tests of life. How disillusioned many will be in the day of revealing, the time when all things will be made apparent! For those with vision and purpose, NOW is the time to make all such decisions. These decisions must be based on individual faith and belief. We cannot hold anyone else accountable. Do you believe what you do only because of what some other family member practices? Such a foundation will subject you to doubt, fear, frustration and turmoil. Peace of mind and continuity of purpose are achieved only through individual belief and conviction.

10. Do not let respect for an organization and desire for human fellowship destroy you. Jesus said, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44.) Salvation comes from remaining a part of the body of Jesus Christ. Christ was the Word of God personified. He is here in spirit. Therefore, we must remain a part of the spiritual body of Truth, which does not change. Indeed, it would be good if the physical manifestation could always be commensurate with the spiritual. But this frequently is not the case. Therefore, when a decision is necessary, choose to remain a part of the unalterable body of Christ, not the defective body of flesh — the physical organization. Compare the statements of Jesus Christ in Matthew 23:5-7.

In order to be faithful to the physical body, most by their actions preferred to accuse Christ of error. They must believe God did not give us the Truth initially. That it does not require the Truth for a physical body to be the Church of God. We must be consistent with our beliefs and practices. By action, the majority of members have chosen the organization over the body of faith — belief.

11. Do not allow natural contempt for truth to destroy you. Because of personal defects which they justify in their own lives, some hurl barbed accusations of "self-righteousness" at those who strive for character perfection. Such castigations are a form of cover-up for their own sins or wrong purposes. The one who judges another of self-righteousness, is reacting to a sensibility toward another whom he feels is condemning him for that which he allows. If the one does not wish to be condemned, neither should he condemn others. We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. All will be judged by the absolute standard of God — The Holy Bible. We should all use it as our mirror to see the self. Personal feelings and assumptions will aid no one in that day of reckoning.

12. Do not allow "fear" of positive action to destroy you. Natural fear is a destroyer. Perfect love casts out that fear. And perfect love is defined by God's laws, statutes, judgments and way of life.

If we have faith in that way — exemplified by the life of Jesus Christ — we will have no fear of physical conditions. But if our eyes are fixed upon men or a group, rather than the Truth of God, we will follow — because of fear (John 12:42) — those men. Why? Note verse 43. Because human beings want the approval of other human beings. Yet, God calls us to become members in particular of the body of Jesus Christ — not any human organization. The real test: Did we individually accept because we had proven the Truth, OR did we accept because of an organization or because of men? In time of test, the real answer to that question will become apparent. By whatever means, the vast majority of members of the Church could not have proven their previous convictions! For, how can one prove error? Their present belief forces them to admit error in the past. There are only two alternatives. One, they knew the Truth initially and as time passed began to transfer their respect for that Truth to men and an organization. Or, two, they never really proved (because you cannot prove error) the way which they practiced and believed.

Fear God only. Do not fear men. If need be, depart from physical organizations before allowing yourself to depart from Christ — the absolute Truth.

How? As Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Ph'p. 4:13). By being aware of the above possibilities, we have won half the battle. Recognize the possibilities — admit our own residual weaknesses, and then call upon God for all the help needed. With this formula, we cannot fail.

Individually consider the example of Christ. At crucial times, He had to stand alone. All others fled. Christ is personified in Truth today. At crucial times, will we flee from Christ — the body of Truth? Or, will we stand individually — as did Christ — if necessary?

Satan will work overtime to appeal to our carnal desires — the above twelve points. Will we resist every effort of Satan? Or, will we succumb to some point which appeals to us for the moment, because we lack vision — vision to see beyond the present, into the significant future?

In conclusion, review your baptismal covenant! It is found in Luke 14:28-33. You have started to build. Did you count the cost? To remain the

servant of Jesus Christ, you must continue in that Word which God gave you (John 8:31). It is the premise of your baptism.

Before concluding this letter, I'll give you a few points of information.

1) Mr. Jim Doak is still improving. All of us wish to thank you for your concern and prayers. Please continue your prayers for him.

2) The tithing article is just about prepared to go to the printers. It should not be long before you receive this article.

3) For those who are on the regular mailing list, you automatically receive new articles as they are published. You need not write to request them. Most who receive this monthly letter will be the automatic recipients of all new literature.

4) Beginning this Thursday (March 3), the tapes will be made in the studio here in Eugene. They will not be the duplication of sermons given before the Eugene congregation. You should notice an appreciable improvement in the quality of the tapes.

5) Also, concerning tapes, if you will mark any defective tapes before you return them, it will be greatly appreciated. It is impossible for us to check every tape before recycling. Also, if you need a replacement because you could not hear the message of the initial tape, please advise us. We will be most happy to send a replacement.

6) Due to the critical nature of weather and drought conditions, we would like to request that all pray for God's blessings upon His people. God has promised to protect His people. However, it is not automatic protection. We must not take it for granted. We need to ask earnestly for that protection. And if we ask, we can rest assured God will hear and answer.

7) Finally, for the benefit of those affected, the Holy Day schedule will be given:

Mr. Bryce G. Clark will remain in Eugene for the entire Passover season and Pentecost. Mr. Artie Satterfield will remain in California for services in that area. Mr. George Leeman will be in the Youngstown area for Passover and Unleavened Bread. He will make arrangements for the area, to harmonize with my schedule.

I will be in Toronto, Canada for Passover and the morning service on the Sabbath. I will then fly down to Newark, so that I may spend the Night to Be Much Observed in the New York - New Jersey area (hopefully, Baltimore

will be up). The Night to Be Much Observed is Saturday evening, April 2. Arrangements will be made by the local people. I will remain in that area for the first High Day and a couple of days following. Then I will fly to Youngstown, Ohio, for a brief visit. The complete schedule will be sent to all those involved.

From Youngstown, I will fly to Fort Worth - Dallas, where I will be for services on the last High Day. Then on to Austin, Texas for a Sunday meeting with people in that area. Finally, I will fly back to Eugene and to a desk replete with work.

I am looking forward to seeing you all during the upcoming Holy Days. Until then, all our love and prayers.

In deepest love and respect,



Raymond C. Cole