

Church of God, The Eternal

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**Announcement Letter
December 1989**

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Dear Brethren:

In this issue we will explain I Timothy 3:1-13. These are instructions the Apostle Paul conveyed to the young evangelist, Timothy.

Spiritual Principle

To properly understand it is vitally essential to set forth a few fundamental facts. First, it was Christ who said He would and did establish the Church. Second, that Church was and is the continuation of His own body. We, as called and chosen servants of God, are members of that body. Third, no one member is the body of Christ. The body of Christ is the collective membership of the faithful. Fourth, we all, physically, recognize the absolute necessity of order, control, and cooperation among members of our own physical bodies. In like manner the body of Christ, spiritually, must have order, control, and internal cooperation among its members. Anything less would be chaos. Fifth, each member of the physical body must function exclusively within its prescribed and appointed limits of responsibility. Can you imagine the little finger demanding or usurping the rights and responsibilities of the eye? We all understand when the principles are put in the context of the physical; but we sometimes lose perspective when we attempt to apply the same principles spiritually.

Now, let us see if we can make sense out of the Apostle Paul's instructions to Timothy. Order and peace within the structure of the church, the body of Christ today, are dependent upon understanding and acceptance of this instruction.

In I Timothy 3, one factor is plainly obvious: Paul is addressing the concept of responsibility. And the sum total of all responsibility is administration. That is, how do these individualized responsibilities function in relationship to one another? To have peace in the body, these duties must function smoothly and efficiently. Controlled, yes, but not by dictatorial powers, only by internal respect and willing compliance. As in the physical body, so in the spiritual body, this harmony exists by a certain esprit de corps. The introduction of foreign elements produces disharmony, a weakening of the whole body, and ultimate destruction if left to its own uncontrolled fate.

Paul is, then, explaining the internal benevolent control which keeps the whole body functioning at top efficiency. Let us see the specifics—based on an overall perspective.

First, the matter of office—level of responsibility—is considered. There are bishops (episcopate—one who superintends); the Diaconate (attendants, ministers of physical and/or spiritual duties); and obviously, since these two previous offices are superintending or ministering to physical needs, there is the level of the laity—the called members of the body of Christ. Compare verses 1 and 10 with the last part of verse 5—speaking of the whole Church of God.

Second, the matter of authority is considered. Within the structure of responsibility, as imposed by God, rulership must be exercised and be manifest in the overall condition of the church. It is important to remember that no authority is of any value unless used for the benefit of the whole body. Using power and authority for personal gain is anathema to

everything for which the Truth, the Way of God, stands. In this context, please note verses 4 and 12 of the same chapter.

Third, the matter of qualification is addressed. In a general sense there are three categories existing in the body. However, it is important to note that in that general body of individuals called the laity—the church—is found a number of other classifications. Elsewhere in God's Word we find the people in general referred to as "babes," "adults," "mature adults," and "elders." What this means is this: At the time of baptism we begin our Christian life as begotten children. As time progresses we should mature spiritually. That is, we should put on more of the character of God and Christ. We should manifest more of the characteristics of the Holy Spirit.

In the same way that the growth of a child requires time, so does spiritual growth. Therefore, one of the qualifications of one who is to serve involves time—growth.

Without spending time to explain or differentiate among the various offices, let us note the requirements—qualifications. Those qualifying must be blameless, married one time only, of impeccable character, industrious, hospitable, having teaching capability, not tipplers, not quarrelsome, not money-crazed, patient, not controversial, not covetous, capable of using power and authority, not novices—sycophants or tyros—bearing a good report from without and within. They must have control of tongue and mind, manifesting love and respect for the truth, having manifested self-control for a goodly period of time, exhibiting an orderly and controlled family life.

Taken as a body, the list of requirements given above manifests one thing: Many of the negative characteristics which must not be exhibited by those bearing office do, however, exist in the general body of the church. If they do not, why, then, emphasize the need of specific character regarding those who are appointed to discharge physical/spiritual responsibility? Indeed, as the Bible abundantly illustrates, there are weaknesses, frailties, and varying levels of spiritual growth in the church. In patience and mercy these people are nurtured, assisted with love and concern—even divorce and remarriage cases—knowing that we all are the workmanship of God and Christ. If the ministry fulfills their spiritual duty of proclaiming unabashedly the Truth of God, others will in due time make the necessary changes in their lives. But these changes must come from the will and purpose of the individual. They cannot be made by anyone from outside of the heart and mind of the individuals involved. Real change is found in both heart and mind—not fear of man or organization.

Analyzing the contents of I Timothy 3, certain facts become obvious. It is in this area of specific application that our present decision is made. No one involved in any questionable area of life can hold areas of responsibility in the church. The reasons are obvious. How can one who exhibits a weakness, is insufficiently trained in both time and experience, and who lacks real conversion and depth of conviction, teach and admonish others, that is, use the power and authority vested in the office. Such a situation is called hypocrisy, an absolute evil in the sight of God. Considering this principle, it becomes very clear that the instructions of I Timothy apply *only* to those who are empowered with duty or office directly under the responsibility of the ministry. In today's terms that would mean no one in the office of a "deacon," "deaconess," directorship of a musical program, or an emcee—since he is speaking on behalf of the minister—can be a novice (not sufficiently trained professionally), spiritually weak, lacking in certain character traits, married more than once, or incapable of using authority judiciously. For that to be a valid and meaningful principle, it follows that within the church over which there is vested authority there are many people at all levels of growth and personal mastery. It is the duty of those vested with responsibility to manifest love, mercy, kindness, and deep concern for the

whole laity—the very foundational principles on which their future spiritual growth will develop.

One final factor needs to be mentioned. Since God does not use a double standard for judgment, those of the laity who exhibit the above weaknesses must all ultimately mature sufficiently to be born spiritually. It is God who calls and grants time for spiritual growth. Those who live the areas of doubt can be judged by God only. At that time there will be no doubts to plague or trouble man who cannot read hearts and minds. No one will assume anything. The judgment will be made by God.

Prayer Requests

[Omitted for confidentiality]

General Requests

[Omitted for confidentiality]

Blessings of Brethren

[Omitted for confidentiality]

Births

Mr-s. Gilbert Bourget: A baby daughter was born November 24, weighing 8 lb 6 oz. Named Michelle Elberta, 21 inches long. Mother and baby are fine.

Deaths

Mother of Mrs. Vivian Burdette: Died peacefully on Monday, November 27, 1989, at 3:10 PM. Vivian thanks all for prayers and requests prayer in this time of adjustment.

Trips

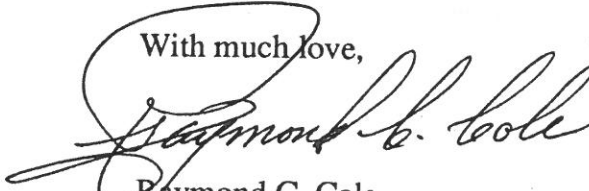
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|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| December 16, 1989 | Raymond Cole, Vancouver, B.C. |
| December 23, 1989 | Raymond Cole, San Antonio, Texas |
| December 30, 1989 | Raymond Cole, Dallas, Texas |
| January 6, 1990 | Raymond Cole, Newark, New Jersey |
| January 13, 1990 | Raymond Cole, Austin, Texas |
| January 20, 1990 | Raymond Cole, Sacramento, California |

Tape Schedule

| Tape series: | Mailed on: | For: | Title/tape #: |
|--------------|------------|---------|--|
| WSE-RC 39 | 10/11 | 11/4 | Confrontations and responses of Christ #18 |
| WSE-BC 122 | 10/11 | 11/11 | Great men of the Old Testament #20 |
| WSE-RC 39 | 11/01 | 11/18 | Confrontations and responses of Christ #19 |
| WSE-BC 122 | 11/01 | 11/25 | Great men of the Old Testament #21 |
| WSE-RC 39 | 11/15 | 12/02 | Confrontations and responses of Christ #20 |
| WSE-BC 122 | 11/15 | 12/09 | Great men of the Old Testament #22 |
| WSE-RC 39 | 11/29 | 12/16 | Confrontations and responses of Christ #21 |
| WSE-BC 122 | 11/29 | 12/23 | Great men of the Old Testament #23 |
| WSE-RC 39 | 12/13 | 12/30 | Confrontations and responses of Christ #22 |
| WSE-BC 122 | 12/13/89 | 1/6/90 | Great men of the Old Testament #24 |
| WSE-RC 39 | 12/27/89 | 1/13/90 | Confrontations and responses of Christ #23 |
| WSE-BC 122 | 12/27/89 | 1/20/90 | Great men of the Old Testament #25 |

Office

We have recently depleted our hymnal insert supply. As soon as more can be made available, we will inform you.

With much love,

Raymond C. Cole


Bryce G. Clark