

# Church of God, The Eternal

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## **Announcement Letter August 2009**

Dear Brethren:

Thank you for the chance to communicate with you once again this month and to express our heartfelt love and regards to the firstfruits of God's work. We pray that you continue to hold fast in confidence and to relish your calling, even under the many increasing pressures of this world. Although it may seem repetitive for us to say as much time after time, please be assured that our expressions of love and appreciation are truly heartfelt, and we are so thankful for the opportunity to know you and to serve you as part of this little remnant flock. Your continued faithfulness is part of the very fulfilment of God's promise that the gates of hell would never prevail against the true church (Matthew 16:18). Your personal efforts to put on more of the mind of Jesus Christ day by day are significant, so never doubt that relevance or importance. The world does not recognize who you are, but one day they will come to understand that you are part of the very ones fulfilling key prophecies in these end times.

### **Spiritual Principle—Electronic Communities**

Who could have imagined even fifty years ago how technology would affect us in this first part of the twenty-first century? Most in God's church back then did not expect time to have gone on this long, so the advent of personal computers, the Internet, cell phones, and the digital age in general have presented the people of God with new issues which were never contemplated during the early years of the church. Yet the basic principles of God—confirmed in the Bible thousands of years ago—still apply with total relevance in this modern age as much as at any time previous.

One of the most popular means today for staying in touch with scattered friends and family is through electronic communities. For those not familiar with computers and the Internet, it is basically a way for people anywhere in the world to post messages on a public "bulletin board" which anyone else in the world can then see and contribute to as well. The companies sponsoring these websites (like Facebook, MySpace, etc.) have tried to replicate

electronically all of the ways human beings enjoy interfacing with each other. In the "old world," if you wanted to make a statement to the whole community, you might stand on a street corner and proclaim your message to everyone passing by, hand out leaflets, or write a commentary in a local newspaper. Today, the same can be accomplished by posting a "blog" (short for web-log) on a site open for everyone to access and to read. Your blog can include text, pictures, audio, video, or all of the above. It is the modern-day equivalent of standing on a soap box in the town square, proclaiming anything you want, except that now you can say it to millions of people around the world. For more private communications, in the "old world" you might meet a friend or small group of friends at a designated place, and then enjoy an interchange with them out of the earshot or view of anyone except those specifically invited. That, too, is now made possible within electronic communities. With a registered "profile" online, you can establish a list of "friends" who have special access to private areas of your "bulletin board." Only those whom you specifically approve for access can engage in personal or small group chats with you and other common friends. You can share text messages (or pictures) with only one friend at a time, or have several friends all sharing simultaneously. How does this differ from simple e-mail, which is a way to send an electronic "letter" to a specific individual like writing and posting an old-fashioned letter in the mail? With electronic communities, you have not only the means to send private messages to individual people, but to bring people together into groups, and to share *dynamically* together among all members, no matter how far away each member may be physically separated.

The advent of these new electronic tools has opened up a means for brethren in God's church to communicate and to share with other friends in the Body as never before. And given the scattered nature of the church today—with many individuals having few or perhaps no others of like mind with whom to meet locally—these tools can certainly be a blessing to alleviate the feeling of isolation. In that regard, there is definitely nothing wrong with participating in electronic communities. But there are also dangers which need to be recognized, and responsibilities for God's people which need to be understood and managed.

Most importantly, recognize that participating in electronic communities involves *fellowship*, just as much as the good old-fashioned kind of interaction with other people. Remember, the reason these Internet-based services are so popular is that they have *duplicated* the very way that human beings have always preferred to interact socially. The whole point is to encourage fellowship with others! But that being true, such interaction is subject to every rule which God laid down in the Bible for His people concerning fellowship.

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them (Ephesians 5:11).

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14).

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat (1 Corinthians 5:11).

With these commandments from God in mind, are you sure you are applying these rules in your use of the Internet, e-mail, chat services, and other electronic tools, as well as the old-fashioned forms of fellowship? Many questions have been asked of the ministry of late, indicating that these issues may not be fully understood. Not only are the same rules applicable, but the potential consequences of *misuse* of electronic fellowship can be *much greater* than that of traditional fellowship. How and why?

In the traditional world, you and I have our personal friends and trusted companions, and people close to us learn *by experience* over time who are included in that "list" of friends. A typical scenario might go like this: Suzie is friends with Jane and Barbara, and because Barbara is also close friends with Helga, Helga has now gotten to know Suzie and Jane and become their friends too! But then Barbara has a disagreement with Helga and they stop talking, making it difficult for others to remain friends with Helga without upsetting Barbara. There is no written list of all of these dynamics, but some version of the facts affecting those circles of friends becomes known in time through interaction and observation. Do these same kind of dynamics take place in the electronic environment? Absolutely! But in the electronic community, much of those "unwritten" aspects are documented boldly in writing for many if not all to see!

On *Facebook*, for example, a registered user has a profile providing basic information about himself which allows others to "find" him online. If an old classmate, for instance, finds your profile and would like to be able to communicate with you, he submits a request to become your "friend." You receive notice that "Reginald" would like to become your friend, and then you must decide whether to either accept or to decline that invitation. If you press the button to accept him, Reginald then becomes listed within your profile as one of your official friends, and then he has access to communicate more easily with you. Not only that, as your official friend, Reginald's profile is now made available to all of your other official friends. Anyone else on your list of friends can view and contact others on that list, and by design, they are encouraged to do so. Reginald might discover from your profile that another old classmate he knows has a registered profile too. Using your "friends" list, he might contact "Friederick" and ask to become his friend as well.

This is just one example to demonstrate the real dynamics at play within these electronic communities. So how does this affect the people of God?

If you participate in these communities, like *Facebook*, your list of "friends" is not just an undocumented assumption based upon observation or hearsay. No, those you have accepted as your "friends" are listed in your online profile for anyone in the whole world to see. And any one of those friends has his own profile which tells what he wants others to

know about himself, including whom he considers to be *his* friends. As a member of God's church, subject to God's instructions about proper fellowship, does your public list of friends correctly reflect your own religious beliefs? The friends we pick say a lot about our own character. George Washington, the first President of the United States, once said, "Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation. It is better be alone than in bad company." This principle is valuable because it is based upon godly wisdom from the Bible:

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold (*New Living Translation*, Proverbs 22:1).

Whoever walks with the wise will become wise; whoever walks with fools will suffer harm (*NLT*, Proverbs 13:20).

The godly give good advice to their friends; the wicked lead them astray (*NLT*, Proverbs 12:26).

Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for bad company corrupts good character (*NLT*, 1 Corinthians 15:33).

For those of you participating in electronic communities, what does your list of friends tell others about your own values? Have you inspected your friends' list of "friends"? By their lists of associates and intimates, what does it say about their own character? Are you confident that publishing that individual as your own friend is confirming your own good reputation? All of this matters. Never think that electronic relationships are somehow "exempt" from the rules of God concerning fellowship. They are not.

What if a former member of the church asks to be accepted as your "friend"? If that individual was never hateful or divisive, but perhaps just weak, it might be just fine. But what if this individual left the church in a hateful and rebellious attitude? According to God's law, that person is to be avoided. Perhaps you did indeed avoid that person and refuse to fellowship in person for a time, even refusing to accept phone calls. But what if that individual surfaces months or years later on Facebook, for example, asking to become your friend? What if you accept him, perhaps only because you are afraid of appearing rude by declining the invitation? Is it really "no big deal"? Well, if that individual has not truly repented, not only have you set a bad example publically by listing someone inappropriate as a personal intimate, you have now opened up your other "friends" in the church to receive contacts by that same individual! Do you really want to be held responsible by God for becoming the conduit through which a wolf gains access to others of God's sheep? If you would never get together in person with that rebel for dinner (2 John 10–11), let alone invite other brethren of the church into such an assembly with one who hates us, why would you



allow the very same thing online? There is no difference. Dear brethren, we need to think about these things very seriously and be sure we are making choices which accurately reflect what we believe about God, His truth, and our own concepts of those doctrines.

What does your online profile say about you right now? Even in the world, many news articles have been written about being careful what you post on the Internet in blogs and electronic profiles. Many prospective employers (among others) are now accessing such personal profiles before hiring, trying to find out more about an individual than what he might have chosen to reveal in an interview. Many candidates are being declined, based upon what they have written and posted "for fun" online. Even more seriously for God's people, if you are allowing certain questionable individuals to have access to yourself and facilitating their access to your other friends in the church as well, you may be playing a very dangerous game in God's eyes. The electronic community can be a blessing if used correctly. But it can be a very serious trap if not managed very wisely.

If you have allowed questionable individuals to be listed as your official "friends" in violation of your own conscience, and you do not feel strong enough to remove them (all it takes to delete them is the stroke of a key) because it would make you "look bad," it might be better for you to get off of those electronic services altogether. But if you do choose to remain involved, recognize that such tools can be used either for good or for evil, and understand that your posted profile, writings, pictures, and choice of friends is making a very bold statement to the whole world about your own character. Is God pleased with the image you are portraying?

## **New Moon**

The new moon, Ellul (sixth month), will begin on the evening of August 20. The new moon day is August 21.

## **Camp Tejas**

Mr. David Brandenburg and Mrs. Jackie Wakefield would like to thank all of those who contributed to the success of this year's camp. Those who volunteered their time, resources and all the preparation of meals and goodies were a big help, as well as the prayers of so many. They were blessed with wonderful weather and a great time was had by all.

We would also like to include a thank you to Mr. Brandenburg and Mrs. Wakefield for their tireless dedication to providing Camp Tejas for the teens each year. It requires much time, thought and preparation to make sure the camp is a success year after year. They are already laying the groundwork for next year's camp, although we must never take for granted that there will be another camp opportunity next year. It is all according to the willingness

and availability of Mr. David Brandenburg and Mrs. Jackie Wakefield as the sponsors, organizers, and driving force behind the project.

## **Birth**

Grandparents, Louis and Janet Nel, sent the following notice: With heartfelt appreciation to our Heavenly Father, we take pleasure in announcing the safe arrival of our first granddaughter, Emily. She was born on July 18 to Louise and Nigel Brown of George, South Africa, and weighed six pounds, nine ounces. Both Mummy and baby are doing well.

## **Excess Second Tithe**

This is just a yearly reminder of the need for second tithe to cover administrative and facility costs for the Feast. We want to reserve adequate for an enjoyable and meaningful Feast. At the same time, we all must remember, to keep the Feast requires the rental of halls, transportation, aid to those who are deserving, etc. If we all contribute, the burden for each is relatively small. A huge thanks to those whose hearts and minds are willing. May God richly and abundantly bless you in all ways.

## **Second Tithe Requests**

Please be reminded that requests for second tithe assistance for the Feast of Tabernacles need to be in by September 1. Any who need assistance should notify us in ample time.

## **Feast of Tabernacles Family Night Socials**

This year the special family night potluck social in Townsend, Tennessee, will be held on Wednesday evening, October 7, at the Highland Manor Motel meeting facility. The coordinator is Mr. Geoff McAbee. You can reach him at (508) 539-2643. In Oregon, the potluck social will be held on Sunday evening, October 4, in the Yachats Commons where we meet for all church services. Mr. Robert Lebleu is the coordinator and can be reached at (541) 689-2912, or by e-mail at [robertlebleu@hotmail.com](mailto:robertlebleu@hotmail.com).

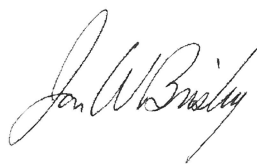
## **Trip Schedule**

September 19	JWB	Modesto, California
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## Recorded Sermon Schedule

Sermon #	Mailed	Played	Title
WSE-RC 76-2	07-02-09	08-01-09	Turmoil in the Church in the Last Days #2
WSE-JB 22-108-24U	07-23-09	08-08-09	Fund. of Belief: Divine Revelation: Arguments Against Divine Revelation
WSE-RC 76-3	07-23-09	08-15-09	Turmoil in the Church in the Last Days #3
WSE-RC 76-4	07-23-09	08-22-09	Turmoil in the Church in the Last Days #4
WSE-JB 22-109-24V	08-13-09	08-29-09	Fund. of Belief: Divine Revelation: Progressive Revelation
WSE-CL2 76	08-13-09	09-05-09	Christian Living Series #2 Kindness #8
WSE-JB 22-110-24W	08-13-09	09-12-09	Fund. of Belief: Divine Revelation: The Real Fruits of Change
Holy Day Tapes	—	09-19/28-09	Trumpets/Atonement

In Christ's service,



Jon W. Brisby