

# **Church of God, The Eternal**

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## **A Brief Explanation of the Relationship Between the Ministry and the Laity**

July 1975

Dear Friends:

Only two and one-half months until the Feast of Tabernacles. What a pivotal time in our yearly activity. This year the excitement and anticipation run very high. The past years have been so troubling and unrewarding. With the help of God, we shall have the opportunity of living the abundantly obedient fulfillment of God's Feast once again.

By the time you receive this letter, you will undoubtedly have already received the Feast letter; or if not, you should receive it in the next few days. The letter and enclosures are being assembled at the time of this writing.

The purpose of this month's letter, as indicated in June, is to briefly explain the relationship which should and must exist between the ministry and the members. Nothing seems to have excited more profound questions. Or, to have been subjected to more consistent ridicule and contempt than the ministry.

A very thorough and documented study paper is being prepared to cover this subject comprehensively. It will be available for all who specifically request it.

Christ, as the Son of God, was sent to this earth. He was that Prophet like unto Moses. The One to whom mankind would give ear. God has spoken at various times by prophets to the people of old but in the last days He spoke by His Son. He was commissioned to speak not His own words, but rather the Father gave Him a commandment what He should speak and what He should do.

One of the significant purposes for which Christ came to the earth the first time was to build His church. And since He is a very purposeful Being, there must be some reason for the establishment of that organization.

## **What Is the Church?**

What is the Church? It is the body of Jesus Christ. We are members in particular of His body. But we are a part of Him only if the Spirit resides in us. The Church is a spiritual entity. Christ said He came to His own (the physical nation of Judah) but they refused to have Him. Then He said, *to as many as receive Him*, to them gave He the power to become the Sons of God. Being a member of any specific organization does not make one a begotten Son of God. If we have not the Spirit of God abiding in us, we are none of His. When possible, rarely would it be the case, it would be marvelous to have the physical entity correspond to the spiritual. But with an active Devil and the subtleties of human nature present, such a possibility is indeed remote. The whole Bible is a graphic and verbal indication of the unique problems innate in this relationship. Only when the true intents and purposes of the heart and mind are manifested can the final evaluation be effected. Therefore, the intrinsic value of Christ's statement: "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Christ came the first time to fulfill all in all. He came to give new orientation and direction. To make it possible, due to works which He fulfilled, for us to have an opportunity of everlasting life. One of those purposes was the establishment of a church, as indicated above. But what was the structure of that church? Since we are to check everything by the Word of God, we need to ascertain Biblically what Christ instituted.

There are specific offices of responsibility. Paul was inspired to detail the organization. In the church are several offices of service. He informed both the churches of Ephesus and Corinth that God had established those offices. God sets human beings, whom He has chosen, in those offices as it pleases Him. It is not of man's doing. It is Christ's Church. He, with the approval of His Father, exercises the responsibility of direction and service in His own body—the Church.

Since the body of Christ continues until His own Second Coming, it is quite obvious that the offices of responsibility continue, also. There is absolutely no place which indicates any change from the original format which He established. He is the author of that way. It continues to this day—unchanged.

## **Truth Revealed Only Through Chosen Servants**

But, why should there be a church? What is the purpose of the body and the offices within it? Christ is a purposeful being. He created or established the church for a very specific purpose. Paul explains that duty to the Ephesian church, in Ephesians 4. They are to do a work! The work of the ministry. Through them God calls those whom He wills to be given an opportunity to have everlasting life. When one puts together all the Biblical

information, it becomes very plain that there is no other way to hear and know the Truth. Sometimes this is accomplished indirectly through a friend or neighbor. But remember, that friend or neighbor had to be taught first. Paul explained to the Romans that it was impossible for anyone to come to the knowledge of the truth except he be taught by a minister. Why?

Christ must call, reveal His truth and then commission every servant He sends into the vineyard of responsibility. What Christ has revealed to His servants, they are held accountable for preaching. It is in this area many of the more serious problems lie. Those we will understand just a little later.

Christ came and taught that which His Father had given to Him. He did not teach or preach His own thoughts or ways. He then said to those whom He had called to carry on the ministry, as He had been commissioned and taught so sends He His own servants into the work. That is, in exactly the same manner and with the same message.

A couple of specific examples are those of Peter and Paul. Paul said as Peter had received the gospel of the circumcision so he had *received* the gospel of the uncircumcision. They did not arrogate these responsibilities to themselves. No! They were called and commissioned. Surely, their offices were quite specific. But were not other offices just as specific? Indeed! Paul warns Timothy, an evangelist, to take heed relative to the office which he had *received*. No office as ordained of God, may be assumed. Only those called by God may exercise those responsibilities.

It was through the ministry you came to the knowledge of the truth. Relative to that, we should have not one single doubt. To do so would be to doubt our own relationship with God, all clever arguments notwithstanding. There are many texts to substantiate this concept. Above all, please note Ephesians 4:11–14.

Can there be any doubt about the significance of what Paul stated? If the body of Christ continues, then the offices of responsibility must also continue. If the office continues, then the object of that office must also continue.

Paul made it clear that the work since the time of Jesus Christ was a ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation means the act of bringing us back to an acceptable relationship with the Father. Why did we need reconciliation? Because we all had sinned. Then the ministry is required to preach God's Law and Ways which identify sin. For it is by the Law that we have the knowledge of sin.

## **Commissioned Servants Are Not Free to Change the Message**

Once positioned by God, a minister is not free to do as he pleases. He must be subject to the consistent scrutiny of God's Word. He must at all times substantiate his office by his works. These works must be obvious to the members of the body of Christ—the Church. Paul was inspired to write considerably concerning this very responsibility. God's chosen must not go to sleep—feeling confident and secure in the organization, assuming that the leaders of the physical body cannot go astray. No one is immune to failure. Paul himself announced his fear of failing after laboring for the benefit of others. To assume any arrogant posture is to deny many very direct commands of the Eternal and on the other hand to invite disaster for themselves.

The responsibility is two-fold. First, you must be consistently watchful that men who have arrogated responsibility to themselves do not gain entrance into the body and thereby mislead you. On the other hand, the vigil must be constant relative to those whom God has chosen. If God asks us to prove Him, is it unwarranted to seek means of checking the ministry—even though truly called and commissioned? Of course not! Isaiah clearly tells us to try them all by the word of God. See Isaiah 8:20. Significantly, we are all to be tried by the Word of God. We are not subject, anyone, to the personal scrutiny of others on the basis of their whims and prejudices. But the clear meaning of God's word will illuminate. It will tell us of our imperfections. However, a meaningful caution: we must be tolerant of those whose hearts and minds are right, those who sin out of weakness. They are working on themselves, with the help of God. They are endeavoring to overcome. But the situation is quite different concerning those who justify themselves in error. Or those who change the law and standard of conduct to make it easier for themselves. God's standard does not change. He is perfect. His desire is that we have the same nature and character He possesses.

Human nature tends to dissipate. There is a natural downward pull which causes society in general to deteriorate over the centuries. We are more corrupt in these last days than at any time previous. It is for that reason, we must be alert to our spiritual responsibilities. Above all, this is not the time to go to sleep. We had better be trying and proving all things.

## **Departure Is From Truth, Not an Organization**

In the last days God said there would develop a mystery of iniquity—a mystery which will ensnare many who formerly professed the truth. Further, He said there would be a great

departure from the truth. No place in all the Bible does it speak of a departure from the church—as a physical entity. Absolutely not! At one time all within the church understood that. No, the departure is from truth. As has been stated so many times, how can you depart from that which you did not have? Just a little thought will tell you the truth was first held and a subsequent departure occurred. Interestingly, change, if approved of God, would indicate the exact opposite of a departure from the truth. In such a case we would be growing into—getting closer to—the truth. Your Bible tells you that the exact opposite is to transpire. What will you believe? The decision of your future and your ultimate fate is up to you—no one else.

Other things to transpire in the last days are: some will turn to fables; there will be a host of false prophets tearing up the flock; that many will feign obedience to the truth, but in reality they have no love for the truth; there will be an effort to arrive at truth intellectually—ever learning—but never coming to the truth and that many will not endure sound doctrine but will heap to themselves teachers—the supposed learned and educated—having itching ears.

With the above in mind, a simple statement of Paul takes on significant meaning: "Know them which labor among you in the Lord." If it could be ascertained on the basis of the physical confines of a church, there would be no difficulty. But such is not the case. Why the instruction to determine those who labor honestly and truthfully among you? Because of the terrifying conditions which will prevail in the last days, you are sternly admonished to trust no man. You had better try them all. A true sheep knows his master—Jesus Christ. He is looking to Christ and will not follow a hireling. Prove them all by the Word of God. If they speak not according to that word, they are none of His. You had better have the courage of your convictions—and act on that courage.

In the final analysis, God can remove anyone whom He pleases. All of us had better hear and fear. The husbandmen in Matthew, Mark and Luke prove this. It might do you well to study the parable carefully.

There is a significant responsibility of the ministry. They are to teach the truth and feed the flock. But there is an equal responsibility incumbent upon every member. He must try all who come to him purporting to teach the truth. For there are wolves coming from within and without the body.

Only by consistent study and prayer are you going to avoid the delusion of the last days. May God help and guide you.

Once again, thank you for your love and prayers. We are grateful to you for your help. Our love and prayers continue with you all daily.

In Christian love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally on the page.

Raymond C. Cole