

# Church of God, The Eternal

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## Who Really Are the People of God?

June 1990

Dear brothers and sisters:

Here we are in the third month of the year already, according to God's calendar. Winter has left us and the earth abundantly gives sap to the branches, causing flowers—many flowers—to burst forth. Each season is faithful to the call of the Creator God, generously giving the hope that fruits will come to maturity in the full radiance of their beauty. "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:3–4). God reminds us of this every Spring by the renewal of nature and His Holy Days. As nature puts on a new, noble, and pure garment, so we have had the marvelous opportunity to cleanse ourselves of our mistakes, failures, and sins. We were abundantly fed spiritually, and by His Spirit we were given everything we need to fight and overcome our foolish passions and to rule our deceptive hearts and minds successfully. God generously blessed us through His Holy Days so that we, too, can present ourselves with fruits in the full radiance of their beauty when we appear before Him this Fall at the Feast of Ingathering.

"And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:5). There are many human beings who profess to be Christians today. We live in a world filled with religions, but whether people read the Talmud, the Bible, or the Koran, many remain ungrateful, hardened, without remorse. Most of them can be equated to the spirit which influences this world, merely because man, by nature, does not like the light, and Satan takes advantage of this situation to be very active on this earth. And yet out of all of that a people was chosen—the people of God. But who are the people of God?

Many churches, many human beings, think that they are the people of God. But believing it is far from being sufficient; what counts is *knowing* whether or not we are really the people of God. Deuteronomy 7:6 enlightens us on that: ". . . the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." And why did God choose such a people? To be "an holy people unto the Lord thy God." So one belongs to the people of God not because he decided, but because he was chosen by God. That fact was confirmed by Jesus Christ, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him . . ." (John 6:44). And the Apostle Paul adds, "And having chosen us, he called us to come to him; and when we came, he declared us 'not guilty,' filled us with Christ's goodness, gave us right standing with himself, and promised

us his glory" (Rom. 8:30, *Living Bible*). It is then through that process that we become the people of God. We must be chosen, then called, then we must respond to the call by repenting and being baptized in order to receive the earnest of the Spirit of God. It is then that we become members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church of God.

But with time many of those called have forgotten their responsibilities and are living under the illusion that they are already saved. They very quickly forgot that in accepting the call they had committed themselves to undertaking a merciless struggle against their own nature and the influences of this world. For Satan is particularly aggressive towards those who received God's Way of life because he knows that God is sanctifying His people and offering them great possibilities. Therefore he is not short of wiles to sow trouble and disorder among God's people. When the children of Israel—God's chosen people under the Old Covenant—came out of Egypt, "a mixed multitude went up also with them" (Ex. 12:38). They were people who had not been chosen by God, but who infiltrated the people of God, later causing them many problems. Through a parable, Jesus Christ warned us that the same conditions would prevail in the last days.

Read it in Matthew 13:24–30 and 36–43. He shows that among the children of God there are also the children of the wicked one, and they must be together until the harvest, that is, until the return of Christ. ". . . When the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also" (v. 26). Because before the ear is formed, it is very difficult to distinguish the wheat from the tares. "Ye shall know them by their fruits," said Jesus Christ.

So God granted time to His called to be taught in the right way and to gain confidence and conviction before He allowed the children of the wicked one to begin to create disorder and divisions. Most of us remember the time when the church of God was perfectly one, just as the twelve tribes of Israel formed a single nation before the split. Yes, Satan is the author of all that which creates agitation and turmoil in the minds of God's called; and, as a result of disappointments and disillusionment, spiritual idleness sets in and the flame of the gift of God weakens in many. It is a serious disease, affecting God's people in the last days. If we are not careful, the epidemic is lying in wait for each one of us, whether we be lay members or ministers. Just before the harvest the fruits have not yet reached maturity, and they can still fall as a result of a storm. And yet which of us called was not like these trees laden with flowers at the time of baptism? We could see the fruits progressively taking shape; each one felt the desire to change his nature and put on the marvelous fruits of God's Holy Spirit. We knew that the Truth of God does not change and will never change. But as ancient Israel turned to the customs of the nations around her, God's people of our time wanted to water down God's Way of life in order to savor the lifestyle of this world.

The problem is not new; it existed in the Church under the Apostle Paul, who said to Timothy, whom he loved as his son:

Therefore I ask you to rekindle the flame which God started in you; do not forget to keep alive the gift which He granted to you in His grace when I laid my hands on you: you are the depository of it now" (2 Tim. 1:6, *Parole vivante* [French translation]).

Nowadays all those who were chosen, called, and made depositories of the gift of the Holy Spirit—scattered as they are—belong to the people of God so long as God has not withdrawn that gift. Their responsibility is to keep that gift alive and utilize it in their lives by bearing good fruits. Addressing the people of God in the last days, the Apostle Peter wrote the following, "The Lord is not late in fulfilling His promise as some think; He is merely very patient with you, because He does not want a single one to perish: on the contrary, He would like all to come to repentance and conversion" (2 Pet. 3:9, *Parole vivante*).

Jesus Christ is still the One who is at the head of His people, and knowing the conditions in which the called would find themselves just before His return, He inspired the Apostle John to write seven letters to the churches. Through these letters He clearly shows the areas where we please Him and those in which we do not, and what we must do so that He may find, at His return, a people united by the same Spirit and ready to welcome their Master. In each of these letters, we see that Christ knows the works, the labor, and the perseverance of each one as he goes through the difficult circumstances which prevail among His people. In fact, these letters show us that the Truth was given, that the same Spirit was given to each one, and that the knowledge was spread among those who were called. But knowledge entails a great responsibility; if we make poor use of it, if we allow ourselves to be influenced by the children of the wicked one and led into unfaithfulness and idleness, then that knowledge becomes dangerous.

Brethren, read these letters in chapters two and three of Revelation. Let each read them as though they were addressed to him personally. Do not forget that these problems exist among God's people in our time, therefore the comments which Christ makes to His people may concern each of us. In chapter two, verses four and five, we read the following, "Yet there is one thing wrong; you don't love me as at first! Think about those times of your first love (how different now!) and turn back to me again and work as you did before. . ." (*Living Bible*). The love of the Truth waxing cold among God's people is one of the signs preceding Christ's return. In verse nine He says:

I know how much you suffer for the Lord, and I know all about your poverty (but you have heavenly riches!). I know the slander of those opposing you, who say that they are Jews—the children of God—but they aren't, for they support the cause of Satan" (*Living Bible*).

Here Christ shows us that the tares and the wheat grow together. The children of the wicked one are those who slander and despise those who live the Truth of God in all honesty and sincerity. God allows such conditions to test the faith of those whom He loves. For He says in verse 10, "Stop being afraid of what you are about to suffer. . . . Remain faithful even when facing death. . ." (*Living Bible*). God is going to try the faith of some through intense trials, but He adds, ". . . I will give you the crown of life—an unending, glorious future" (*Living Bible*). Verses 14 and 15 show us that there are people whose behavior is comparable to Balaam's. They compromise, they mix the Truth with the ways of this world, they corrupt the original Truth to re-immense themselves progressively in the philosophy of this world. In verse 20 we see another problem among God's people; Jezebel is a type here, she represents women who lead their husbands and who oppose with arrogance the way which God made known to them. Spiritually, she prostitutes herself by altering the teaching and education which were given to God's people, and she seeks to lead the true servants of God into her lifestyle which she made into a doctrine in order to seduce. As we are told in Psalm 106:39, "Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions." In Revelation 3:2 we read the following, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God." So there are some called in whom there are only certain principles of the Truth left, which are Moreover about to die. Verses 15 and 16 speak of another attitude which prevails among God's people. Christ says, "I know you well—you are neither hot nor cold; I wish you were one or the other!" (*Living Bible*). These are converted people who are lukewarm, spiritually; they have no enthusiasm for God's Way of life; they practice certain things because they were ordered to, but the impetus does not come from the heart; they do not have that confidence and trust which God expects of His people.

Brethren, these letters were not written for us to point an accusing finger at other persons or other groups, but to analyze our own individual lives carefully and see of what we must repent and what we still have to overcome. In Revelation 2:7, Christ says to each of us, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. . ." ["Let this message sink into the ears of anyone who listens to what the Spirit is saying to the churches . . ." (*Living Bible*)]. *Anyone!* God means each individual; this message is addressed to all those who were called, for all received the single Truth and the same Spirit. Divisions stem from the fact that some have introduced their own doctrines and others allow these conceptions to influence and lead them astray. Whatever our state, having been called we must hear and understand what the Spirit says to the churches, for speaking of the Spirit of Truth, Christ said, ". . . [it] will guide you into all truth . . ." (John 16:13). If we ask God to show us what we are and where we stand, the truth about our personal life will be revealed to us, for God says, "I know thy works." He knows the works which we have done, He knows those which we fail to do, and He knows the ones which we have not wanted to do because we reject the revelation and refuse to be corrected by His Word in order to be purified—"a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" before his Master. It is true that we sometimes have reason to be saddened when God shows us exactly

what we are and what we still have to achieve in our lives in order to be acceptable in His sight. So, if we are involved in some of the things written in these letters, what is the solution to improving our life situation?

Let us first take heed and accept what Christ reveals to us. Then, as He tells us in Revelation 3:19, let us "be zealous therefore, and repent." We must arm ourselves with zeal to resume what we have neglected, to repent and be willing to do what remains to be done in order to become victorious. Christ, who is still the Head of God's people, does not condemn us, but He warns us, saying:

I continually discipline and punish everyone I love; so I must punish you, unless you turn from your indifference and become enthusiastic about the things of God. Look! I have been standing at the door and I am constantly knocking. If anyone hears me calling him and opens the door, I will come in and fellowship [*King James*, "sup"] with him and he with me" (Rev. 3:19–20, *Living Bible*).

What a marvelous picture of that meal to be shared with Christ! It shows us that a most intimate relationship has been regained and that we can rely on all the help which we need to reach the ultimate goal, which is to be "an holy people unto the Lord thy God." Christ is always willing to strengthen those relationships and He shows us that in the last days, despite the agitations and harmful influence *within* the Church and in this world, there are people who refuse to let themselves be influenced and who succeed in living in the Way which is pleasing to God. To those people Christ says in Revelation 3:10, "you have kept my word, you have set your heart on my call and you have waited for me with patience and perseverance. Therefore I will in turn keep you from the hour of trial which is to come on the whole world to try the inhabitants of the earth" (*Parole vivante*). Why do these people manifest so much courage in trial and why are they such marvelous examples while waiting with patience and perseverance? Because they know, as we read in 2 Peter 3:9, that the Lord is not late in fulfilling His promise, but He is merely very patient with the called of God, because He does not want a single one to perish. On the contrary, He would like all to come to repentance. Furthermore, we see that these people have set their heart on the call of God. In other words, they have continually been willing to be led by the Spirit into all the truth concerning their own lives, they have admitted what they really are without justifying themselves and they have worked on their salvation without respite, while being extremely aware of the dangers which can be caused by their own minds and the harmful influences which lurk around them. Vigilance is imperative, for He tells them, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11). *Hold fast!* Until when? Until the harvest, until the day of the gathering when on the one hand there will be the righteous shining like the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and on the other hand there will be gnashing of teeth on the part of those who did not take advantage of the patience which Christ showed in order for them to repent, but who took pleasure in committing offenses and iniquity among God's people.

Jesus Christ repeatedly says in His letters addressed to the seven churches, "he that overcometh"! This shows us, my dear brethren, that the struggle between the power of the ways of death and the power of life is most arduous until the very day of the harvest.

Thank you, brethren, for your example and your encouragement. We will soon be observing the Fall feasts; may they be a source of encouragement, inspiration, and joy to you all, accompanied by the marvelous blessings of Christ's strength and power in your lives. That is my deepest desire for each of God's called.

Affectionate greetings to you all,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J. Aviolat'.

Jean Aviolat