

# Church of God, The Eternal

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## **An Admonishment: Act on the Word**

June 1993

Dear Brethren:

After writing most of the *Monthly Letter*, I suddenly decided that the subject being covered warranted much more space, time, and evaluation of material than I had to devote to it prior to our departure for Europe. For that reason, the subject, "An Admonishment: Act on the Word," is being sent in the month of June. The original concept will probably be divided and submitted in a couple of later issues. That subject, the significance and purpose of personal Bible study, is of critical importance. Sufficient time and space must be devoted to it to cover the material correctly.

The old adage, knowledge is of no value except as it is applied, is of double significance in the spiritual realm. Even the one called of God to live the way of life is not blessed unless he acts on the word which he has heard. God wants change in *our* lives; not overt attempts to change His unchangeable way. Men are perverse. In whatever way possible they will alter the instruction and command of God. Instead of changing the self in order to conform to the perfect way of life delivered, corrupt mankind will attempt to change the standard so that the rule by which man is judged is less harsh and much more easily attained. Such a practice will neither produce the high moral quality of life God expects nor make it possible for man to realize the objective of his endeavor.

### **The Imperative Need**

Though there are literally thousands who claim to embrace the will of God, only the truly called know who they are. As the called of God, we know who we are. We are His children. We know that the mind of Christ is singular, and that there is but one way of life. The problem sometimes, however, is not in the knowledge which we possess; it is in the will to perform. Too frequently people, even in endeavors of this world, fail not for a lack of knowledge but due to a lack of resolve and determination. One of the best descriptions of that urgent need is found in the *Moffatt Translation* of James 1:22–25. It reads:

Act on the Word, instead of merely listening to it and deluding yourselves. For whoever listens and does nothing, is like a man who glances at his natural face in a mirror; he glances at himself, goes off, and at once forgets what he was

like. Whereas he who gazes into the faultless law of freedom and remains in that position, proving himself to be no forgetful listener but an active agent, he will be blessed in his activity.

The blessings of God come from obedience; not from the knowledge of what is right. Let us ask the question: Do we really hear? Do we stop and appropriately apply what is really being said? What we do not hear, that is, really hear, we cannot change or correctly apply to ourselves.

What are the genuine manifestations of one under control, effecting required mastery and purpose? Fruits borne are always clearly obvious. What are the fruits which God expects us to manifest? The faithful and dedicated will consider these fruits and weigh himself against that standard.

## **1. Control of Mind and Heart**

The mind gives direction to every member of the body. The emotional dimension is added by the "heart." Since the natural mind is of the flesh, there must be a change of mind. Change must be effected from outside of man himself. The mind by which this change comes is the mind of Jesus Christ. Through the promise of the Holy Spirit, man can possess a different mind—the mind of the Spirit, the same mind possessed by Jesus Christ. To the Philippians Paul wrote: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). With the power of that mind, any man, if sufficiently determined, can effect required changes in his personal life. Jesus Christ, with the control of that mind which He possessed, lived a sinless, perfect, life. If that same mind has control within our bodies, will it not give the same power and direction to us?

Men, because of the enormous power and influence of the carnal mind, all too frequently allow their fleshly minds to sway and dominate their thoughts and actions. Christ resisted the pulls of the flesh with aggressive determination. Few men will resist to the point of losing blood. When men sin, generally it is because for the moment they want to do whatever the flesh dictates. They may regret the action later and even wish they had not behaved in the manner in which they did. But, the action has already taken place. They are sorrowful for actions taken, when at the moment they do not want to repeat the things which were so demanding moments earlier. The key to real success is to manifest self-control at the moment when the very fabric of the body and mind desire to manifest the works of the flesh.

The genuinely converted are empowered with the necessary equipment to be successful in their war against the flesh. With the aid of the powerful mind of Christ, we can fulfill the expectations of God as written by the Apostle Paul. He wrote:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3–5).

The carnal mind is opposed to spiritual things (Rom. 8:7; Gal. 5:17). Deceptively, those minds will induce us to question the veracity of God, the necessity to resist the pulls of the flesh, and to accept the imperative nature of spiritual things. Since the heart, which gives emotional direction to the mind, is desperately wicked and cannot even be comprehended by the natural mind, it is not strange to see men pervert the truth and thereby make their way easier and more compatible with the dictates of the fleshly members.

The elements of flesh are written into the very fabric of our hearts and minds. We automatically react to situations and conditions in accord with the dictates of that flesh. Yet, the purpose of God is that the spiritual traits of the mind of Christ, and of the Father, should be written into our hearts and minds (Heb. 10:16). The accomplishment of that high objective is fraught with pain and much difficulty. To react in a fleshly manner is natural. However, to respond spiritually, automatically, is another matter. All too frequently, even the sincerely dedicated, react carnally and then begin to effect a change from the carnal to the spiritual as consciousness begins to play a vital role in our thoughts. Such responses are not entirely acceptable. God wants the spiritual written into our hearts and minds in a more dominating manner to that which exists in the flesh.

One other factor plays a vital role in the orientation of man's thinking. Doubt! It is extremely difficult for man to manifest real faith. Of course, there is much feigned faith. Feigned faith, however, will not grant us the hope we have long nourished—the hope of everlasting life. Any doubt is evidence of disbelief. And, as we are told, anyone who doubts will receive nothing. We must implicitly believe that He is and that He is the rewarder of all who diligently seek him.

Have we really effected complete and effective control over the mind and heart? Do we, on a daily basis, manifest the thinking of Christ; or, do we yet manifest the works of the flesh?

## **2. Control of the Tongue**

The power of life and death are in the tongue. It is one of the features of man which makes him different from all other created creatures. Along with capacity of mind, speech makes man unique. He possesses the powers of engineering and planning. He can think and produce. Yet, uncontrolled, these very features make him subject to perversity and rebellion

in a way possible with no other flesh being. So serious is the matter of speech that Christ said:

He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy [Spirit] shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy [Spirit], it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned (Matt. 12:30–37).

Those are very plain and sobering words. Control of our speech is imperative if we honestly seek access to the Kingdom of God. Proper use of our speaking capability requires good and evaluatory usage of the power of the mind. We must stop and think. Problems do not usually occur due to a lack of knowledge. For the most part, such difficulties come because we do not spend sufficient time evaluating what we plan to say. Are our intents honest, right, acceptable before God, necessary in the first place, and always designed to serve and help others and not the self? Remember, rumor mongering is one of the most hateful and injurious sins of all. In this context the Apostle James added much enlightenment. His blockbuster statement reads: "If any man among you [the called of God] seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26). Surely we do not want our efforts to be classified, ultimately, as vain, useless. We must take the time to evaluate our words before we speak them. James continues:

Behold, we put bits in the horses mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. . . . the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison (James 3:3–6, 8).

Would we be made perfect? James tells how. "For in many things we offend all, if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body" (James 3:2). Do we have time to be concerned, except in prayer, about the affairs of others? Literally, it will take all our time, energy, and heartfelt dedication just to master the unruly tongue. And to master that member requires absolute mind control, the source from which all thoughts arise.

There appear to be at least three distinct areas of emotional control required. We shall consider each: 1). The response to life's stimuli. 2). How we respond—patiently or in agitation. And, 3). The purpose of our responses—peace or contention.

First, emotional control is vitally essential to successfully accomplishing—the purpose for which God called us. By laying aside the natural tendencies of the flesh and carnal mind, the called can receive the knowledge of God's purposes, His word, with equanimity and aplomb. Genuinely loving the truth given, he will diligently and purposefully act on this newly acquired knowledge (James 1:21). He reads God's Word for the purpose of supporting that knowledge given (Acts 17:11). (This verse does not imply that the gift of God, the truth, is subject to man's verification. In another letter, we will address this troublesome issue). Is it possible that two orientations of mind are acceptable to God? On the one hand favor and blessings are tendered those who calmly and confidently receive the message delivered. On the other, some believe an equal blessing is granted to those who receive the "truth" with doubt until, by the prowess of their own minds, they "check out and verify" the message delivered. How is it possible for both ways to be acceptable to God?

The principle of necessary emotional control is clearly elucidated in an example given by the Apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 8:11–12, Paul addresses a cardinal responsibility of the called Christian—voluntary contributions for godly purposes. He writes:

Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that which he hath not.

In all situations God requires a response on the basis of what is possessed—not on that which he does not possess. Either money or spiritual knowledge. The key to an acceptable response is willingness. The natural mind is resentful and reluctant; the spiritual mind is willing and responsive. A contrite and responsive orientation is of great value and highly honored by God.

### **3. How We Respond—Patiently or in Agitation**

Whether awaiting the action of God's hand in divine healing, the realization of some specific need or assistance, or delivery from some trying situation, the requirement is the same. In patience will be found the final fulfillment of our hope and expectation (James 5:7–15). The farmer plants his seed and then waits patiently for the expected results. So we, as the servants of God, must settle our hearts and minds in confidence and assurance—patience. Unless we can accept the need of trial and experience we are all too frequently prone to manifest wrath, doubt, and an ugly spirit while we wait. Consider the example of the prophets of old. Though they never realized the physical promise of God, they waited in faith until death. They never gave up their hope in the fulfillment of the promise of God. While we wait we must judiciously watch our minds and tongues. Our words will reveal either our faith and confidence or manifold doubts and contempt.

Our assurance of success as the chosen of God is found in Luke 21:19. He wrote: "In your patience possess ye your souls." Simply put, that means we must, at all times, manifest emotional stability—confidence and unwavering purpose.

How solid and reassuring is our faith, confidence, and determination. Remember, both our words and our actions will reveal the real purposes of minds and hearts.

### **4. Purpose of Our Responses—Peace or Contention**

Contention, strife, divisiveness, and hatefulness are manifestations of the natural nature of man. Peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. The behavioral patterns of men reveal the orientation—the emotions—underlying men's actions. Those emotions never lie. James, in one of the most beautifully expressed sections of the Bible dealing with the human emotions says:

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying, and strife in your hearts: glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace (James 3:13–18).

Can anything worthwhile be added to the above? By living up to that exalted standard we can have implicit confidence and assurance. Our duty is implicitly delineated in James 4:11:

Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

Once again, let us understand the necessity of responding to the needs in our own personal lives, not attempting to evaluate the lives of others.

## 5. Control Manifested Only Through Faith

Faith is not indigenous to flesh; it derives from the Spirit. And it is the ultimate ingredient upon which salvation depends. Historical manifestations of genuine faith, in the lives of the converted, are almost legion. Tragically, however, few people will visibly manifest genuine faith in these last days (Luke 18:8). Why? Because genuine faith—the faith—is manifested in uncompromising obedience to the revealed way of life. A condition frequently compromised in our day. Only those called can compromise faith. The uncalled have never been given the Spirit; therefore, faith has not been experienced because faith is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul wrote:

For the time [near the time of Christ's Second Coming, v. 1] will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables (2 Tim. 4:3–4).

Faith and genuine love of the truth have not generally prevailed in our day. Such faith is manifested in the pursuit of an unchanging way initially delivered to a chosen servant commissioned and sent in these last days. Even though that servant allowed unauthorized changes in doctrine, God still holds His people responsible for continuing in the faith first delivered (Jude 3).

In conclusion, brethren, let us remember: We are called and we know the way of life delivered. It is now our duty to pursue that way faithfully until the day of Christ's Second Coming. Being called and made knowledgeable of that priceless way makes us accountable. ". . . to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

Will you be among the faithful in that monumental day of judgment?

With much love and respect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Raymond C. Cole