

Church of God, The Eternal

P. O. Box 775

Eugene, Oregon 97440

www.cogeternal.org

The late Raymond C. Cole
Founding Pastor
Jon W. Brisby
Pastor, Director

Offices in:
United States
Philippines
Switzerland

The Plight of God's True Servants—Past, Present, and Future

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Dear Brothers and Sisters:

To you all who love the immutable way of God, my warmest and most sincere greetings.

Many important circumstances which happened in the course of the year show to us that the Kingdom of God is close. For those who believe in the immutable Truth of God and have resolved to keep it in them through all eternity, one of the most striking facts is that God deemed it good to give rest to one of His servants whom He had entrusted with a very heavy responsibility among the people of God in our generation. A responsibility which that servant fulfilled for many years with the same determination and the same faith as those who are mentioned to us as examples in God's Word. But by many human beings that man was not known, and by many called ones his message was not believed. That is why the prophet Isaiah states, "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness" (Isaiah 57:1–2).

Throughout history which is recorded for us in the Bible, the great majority of mankind have not recognized the true servants of God. For example, in the time of the flood only Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord; he was a preacher of righteousness among a generation which was full of violence. A generation which Jesus Christ likens to the one that will exist in the time of His Second Coming. So Noah was a righteous man who was walking with God. He taught God's way to the people of his time so that those who would believe and live God's commandments could come through the wrath of God which was going to fall upon that generation. ". . . Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God ['He tried always to conduct his affairs according to God's will,' (*The Living Bible*)]" (Genesis 6:9, *Revised Standard Version*). That is a glorious statement which God made about Noah. As for the others, ". . . God saw that the wickedness

of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). That is why, in order to save Noah's life and the lives of his family and furthermore the human race, God commanded him to build an ark. Although Noah was a man of faith and righteousness before God, his message was not believed by his generation; the people of his time treated him as they pleased.

Ancient Israel who received the Truth of God through Moses did no better. They too rejected God's perfect way and thus departed from the true God to serve strange gods. God warned them, saying, "Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers" (Jeremiah 7:25–26). So, generation after generation, the true servants of God were not believed, and people treated them as they pleased.

Elijah was one of those prophets whom God chose to bring His people back onto the right track. For God's people in that generation were at their lowest regarding their behavior while serving strange gods. History shows us in First Kings, chapter eighteen, that Elijah gathered the people and the prophets, and said to them, ". . . How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (verse 21). In other words he said to them, "Be honest with yourselves, choose either the one or the other." Showing us that we cannot allow ourselves to mix our own ways with God's way and claim to live the Truth of God, because God does not accept such behavior. So one of Elijah's main missions was to bring the chosen people of God back to living the Truth of God and serving the true God. But the people of that generation did not believe Elijah's message; they needed something concrete in order to accept Elijah as a true servant of God. Elijah is also a model of authority and faith to other servants of God whom He subsequently would entrust with a comparable mission.

At the first coming of Jesus Christ, God's people of that time were not serving the true God anymore. Though they were observing some of God's laws, the Sabbath and the Holy Days, Christ said, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8–9). This is a statement of Jesus Christ which shows us that the people of that generation had not believed the message of the servant whom God sent just before Christ began His ministry. That servant was John the Baptist. We read in Luke 1:17, "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." How was John the Baptist going to make ready a people prepared to accept Christ? By exhorting them to repent and live by God's commandments as they had been delivered through Moses, and by restoring the unity of God's people as a result of their obedience. There is nothing in God's Word which shows us that the Truth, the faith once delivered, is something variable. Truth is immutable. That is

why it can be with us forever, as we are told by the Apostle John in his second epistle. "The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever" (verses 1–2). That is how perfect unity in God the Father, in Jesus Christ, and among brothers and sisters is realized. John the Baptist exhorted God's people of his time to turn from their evil way in which they had engaged, to repent and live again God's perfect Truth which had been given. But was he recognized by God's people of his time as one sent of God to make ready a people prepared for the Lord? If you read the testimony of John the Baptist in John 1:19–23, you will see that even John did not recognize himself as a prophet walking in the spirit and power of Elijah. He merely said that he was the voice of one crying in the wilderness. So it was by the message which John the Baptist brought that God's people of his time should have recognized him as the messenger at the first coming of Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ began to speak about John, He said, "But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist . . . And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come" (Matthew 11:9–11, 14). Jesus Christ said to the multitudes, ". . . if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come" (verse 14, *RSV*). He is the one who, at that time, came in the spirit and power of Elijah to exhort God's people to regain their unity—to turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just—in order to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. But what was the orientation of the people of that time? Addressing Christ, ". . . his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist" (Matthew 17:10–13). Did John the Baptist then fail in his mission? Hardly! Christ only praises him; on the other hand He levels a severe reproach toward the people, ". . . he wasn't recognized, and was badly mistreated by many" (verse 12, *The Living Bible*). In chapter eleven, verse eighteen, we see how they treated him, ". . . they say, 'He has a demon'" (*RSV*). So he was accused of being a worker of the devil, his reputation was tarnished, and he was humiliated in many ways. And the very Son of God was criticized in the same manner by God's people of His time. Only a minority accepted the message and believed. That is confirmed in Matthew 21:32, "For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him."

Now, in the last days, before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, an Elijah is promised to us as well. Read chapter four of Malachi. As John the Baptist was the forerunner of the first coming of Jesus Christ, so a servant of God is chosen by God in the last days to be the forerunner of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, before the coming of the great and

dreadful day of the Lord. He will be a servant or a messenger who will walk before God in the spirit and power of Elijah, with the same faith, with the same confidence as Elijah and John the Baptist, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers. What is the exhortation? "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments" (Malachi 4:4). His mission is comparable to Elijah's in ancient Israel and to John the Baptist's at the first coming of Jesus Christ. It is bringing God's people back to the revealed Truth, for them to be faithful to that way of life. That is the only remedy to create again the unity of Christ within families, among God's people, and ultimately for all humankind to be able to be part of the Family of God. God promised to send His people of the last days a servant who would fulfill that mission before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. A time period when God is going to intervene in the affairs of this world and His people will be refined.

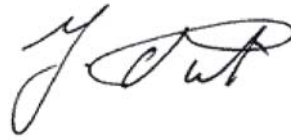
Then, brethren, let us ask ourselves the following question: Among God's people of our time was there a messenger of God, a witness to the Truth revealed at the beginning, who exhorted the people of God for many years with faith and conviction, who exhorted them to be obedient to the statutes, the judgments, the law given to Moses, who beseeched them to walk in the footsteps of Christ, having faith in the revealed Truth, who recommended to them to be faithful until the return of Jesus Christ? Someone who was going to come up against the same resistance from the people of God as his predecessors. His message was not going to be believed by the great majority of the called of God; that man was not going to be recognized as a messenger sent by God. Many were going to treat him as they would please, by criticizing, by accusing, by soiling his reputation. Was there someone in this time of apostasy who brought a small remnant back to being faithful to God, lest God smite the earth with a curse (Malachi 4:6)? Jesus Christ tells us that a time is coming when there, ". . . shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:21–22).

Several circumstances must yet transpire; they will confirm whether that prophecy of Malachi was fulfilled and God did send His messenger to exhort His people to come back to Him, or whether it must yet be fulfilled. The Apostle Paul describes one of those circumstances to us in 2 Thessalonians 2:7–8, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." Jesus Christ also warns us, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before" (Matthew 24:24–25).

Let us note that miracles are not a proof that the individual is living by the Truth of God. John the Baptist performed no miracle, and yet Jesus Christ said of him that he was more than a prophet.

Let us therefore be aware of the times in which we live, and let us be on our guard against the danger of doing whatever is right in our own eyes. Let us live, being sure to remain faithful and loyal to God, having the love of the Truth and learning more and more to put our lives into God's hands. Then, with those who are at rest and are waiting for us, we shall appear together in exhilaration before the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ when He comes back.

With my most respectful affection,
Your worker in Christ,

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

Jean Aviolat