

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

Are We Growing in Emotional Character?

December 2003

Greetings Brothers and Sisters of the Faith:

Greetings from our small group here in the Vancouver, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, area. I hope this letter finds each of you in your respective areas well and in good spirits as we journey together in this present life. This month we want to look at a natural human trait that can cause Christians much unneeded turmoil and conflict, and which leads to confusion and unhappiness if we are not in control of it. Are we in spiritual control of our emotions or are they controlling us? If we can take God's word and apply His spiritual principles, the result can be a great source of growth and a rewarding experience.

In living this life of a Christian, are we striving as did our forefathers to develop the kind of character that will endure unto the end? Does our character show evidence that we truly strive to live by faith? That is a very dynamic question, but if we are God's chosen people we are going to have to develop that kind of character through the presence of God's Holy Spirit working in each of us. True conversion manifests righteousness through and by the presence of God's Holy Spirit, with the connotation of being Christlike. We have to continually strive to lay down our old carnal lives and to live by God's righteous laws. We can learn from the very outstanding examples recorded in the Bible of men who through severe trials and tests did not lose sight of the promises given them, but persevered through faith and obedience to obtain them. Our lives must evidence the presence of God working in us through His Holy Spirit.

As we take a look at some of those holy men of old that God recorded as being righteous, let us see why they were assigned that title. They had character traits we must

strive to acquire in order to deal with similar trials we experience in this life, living in this godless society of the end time.

Righteous Noah

Noah lived a righteous life in the midst of violence and corruption. He stood alone preaching to a world of sin and corruption much like the society and world we live in now. Notice what the Holy Scriptures say about Noah.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God (Genesis 6:8–9).

And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation (Genesis 7:1).

And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly (2 Peter 2:5).

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Hebrews 11:7).

Noah had the faith to believe God and had a healthy fear and awe of Him. The *Living Bible* says in Genesis 6:8–9, that Noah found favor with the Lord and that he consistently followed God's will and enjoyed a close relationship with Him. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, and by his words and actions he condemned the world of that day. Noah was a righteous and just man. He acted and conducted his life in accordance with that which was morally fair and honest.

Faithful Abraham

Abraham, like Noah, had to stand alone and lead his family, protecting them from the pollution of the world. God took Abraham away from the influence of idolatry that was present in the land—idolatry practiced even by Abraham's relatives. It was a godless society which had evolved since the time of the flood.

And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac (Joshua 24:2–3).

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee (Genesis 12:1).

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went (Hebrews 11:8).

Abraham believed God and obeyed without resistance. Through the severe trials and tests that he had to experience, he maintained faith in God and trusted His words and promises implicitly. He was told to take up all his belongings and family and go to a country that he did not know. He trusted God and had the faith that God would be with him, therefore telling us that Abraham lived an outstanding life in the midst of the idolatry of his relatives. He had learned to have faith in God and to trust Him. So when God told him to leave his own country, he simply obeyed immediately and departed with his family.

So Abraham departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Ha'ran. And Abram took Sa'rai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Ha'ran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came (Genesis 12:4–5).

God told Abraham of his promised inheritance that his seed would be as the stars in heaven and through him all families would be blessed. The righteousness of Abraham was in his unwavering faith and obedience to God's word. "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Who against hope believed in

hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness (Romans 4:17–22).

Abraham had received promises that he would be the father of many nations through his only son Isaac. He still kept that faith even after he received the command to offer up his son as a sacrifice on an altar. He proved his faith by his works.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure (Hebrews 11:17–19).

Moses, the Man of God

Moses was a great man of God. His unending faith in God's instructions and commandments went with him until his death. Leading the stiff-necked and rebellious nation of Israel, he attained the title "the man of God." There was no other prophet like him in Israel thereafter.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:24–27).

Moses recognized that all of the grandeur, riches and power—that were certainly his to enjoy in Egypt—were of no worthy comparison to the reward of suffering reproach for Christ. He forsook all of that, knowing full well what was ahead and that he would suffer the reproach of all Egypt.

The Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul understood what true righteousness was and that it was not something that we humanly can acquire by ourselves. Notice what he said to the Philippians; these very same spiritual principles are as important and necessary for us today as they were in any era of God's Church:

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. . . . But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith (Philippians 3:3, 7–9).

We have been given the opportunity to build the same kind of spiritual character that was borne of our forefathers—the holy men of old. We need a great deal of compassion and love for this way of life. We need the spirit of Jesus Christ living within us so that with proper emotions, we are driven to choose the right path as opposed to going emotionally the wrong direction, making wrong decisions. In dealing with relationships and certain circumstances of life, if we are not properly evaluating our decisions and actions in striving for righteous character, we could be failing greatly in responsibility. One characteristic of human beings that can cause us not to achieve this is emotional instability. This instability can cause us to become greatly troubled and afflicted in striving to overcome and grow toward that perfection. There are very positive and concrete ways to avoid many of the pitfalls that Christians sometimes experience. With some work and a few guidelines we can avoid or greatly minimize the turmoil that human emotions tend to bring upon us unnecessarily.

First, we must realize that we cannot overcome the problem of reacting wrongly with our emotions by just relying on our own strength or what our natural natures dictate. Reading what the scriptures tell us is the first step. We have to recognize what it is in order to begin the process. We have read these many times, but do we really grasp how strongly our natures oppose that true way?

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:6–8).

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

The Apostle Paul tells us in a message to the Corinthians the result of being carnal and walking as a natural human.

For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? (1 Corinthians 3:3).

Those scriptures give us an idea what it is to react humanly and what to look for to avoid falling for what our human reasoning dictates. Now let us look at what we must do to start on the road to better emotional control—the process of dealing with our human natures.

We must take control of our thoughts, to hold them captive against our natural will. If the thoughts are against God's will, then we must hold them captive and not act or react inappropriately.

(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 Corinthians 10:4–5).

Taking our wrong thoughts into captivity will stop the emotional process of reacting. Wrong actions of the emotions are simply the natural flesh reacting in a natural way, in the absence of God's Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that gives life or quickens us, causing us to react in a way that leads to eternal life and spiritual health, as opposed to reacting in a humanly or fleshly manner which brings sorrow and disappointment.

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life (John 6:63).

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23).

The Apostle Paul understood that there was a very strong force in his body, that which he had to be on guard against constantly. Notice what he stated:

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members (Romans 7:22–23).

Uncontrolled emotions will cause us much trouble. If we have strong reactions through our emotions, this usually determines the actions we take. Emotions can be defined as strong feelings of any kind such as joy, grief, fear, hate, love, anger, or excitement. A synonym of the word "emotions" is "feelings." The meaning of "feelings" is: the condition of one that feels; being conscious, aware, or a sensation of the state of mind in which joy, sorrow, fear, anger, or any similar sensation is felt through the emotions. The feelings are the tender and sensitive side of our natures. The emotions and feelings cause a wide range of actions by a person. The results depend upon whether the person can control his emotions or if he lets the emotions control him. There are really only two possible reactions for Christians in dealing with their emotions. The first alternative is a strong need to satisfy the desires of the flesh and the second is that, by the Spirit of God, we diligently strive to fulfill God's will in our lives. The works of the flesh as compared to the fruits of the Spirit are explained by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:16–26. Paul recognized the traits of human nature. It is very possible that by our actions we can easily cause others to react in a wrong manner also, and that is why we need to learn self-control. We do not want to be responsible for provoking others.

Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another (Galatians 5:26).

God saw fit to record an example of emotions getting the best of a man as he committed the very act of murder against his brother. The example is that of Cain and Abel. Cain was ruled by his emotions, and they caused him to be very wrath with his brother. One point to remember here is that Abel did no wrong to Cain. He had obeyed God, and God was pleased with him and his offering. Abel was in harmony with God's laws concerning offerings, because his offerings were of the "firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof," representing the best of his flocks. The witness of Abel was that he was righteous, which indicated that he was faithfully obedient to God's laws.

And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering (Genesis 4:4).

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh (Hebrews 11:4).

Cain committed the sin of murder when he slew his brother, but that was only the result of many more sins Cain committed in his life. It all started because his brother's offering had been pleasing to God, but his was not accepted, neither did God have respect for Cain. Abel's works were righteous, but Cain's were evil.

But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell (Genesis 4:5).

Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous (1 John 3:12).

When he saw that Abel's offering was favored and respected by God it made him very wroth, or angry. Cain made several mistakes here. His emotions dictated his actions, and he responded with wrath and jealousy. His countenance fell, which means that his face and body language showed an angry expression. In other terms, he simply reacted emotionally and carnally.

And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him (Genesis 4:6–7).

When the Lord asked Cain, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" it indicated Cain knew what doing well meant in giving this offering to the Lord. He knew what was right. It is safe to assume that in many ways, in his farming practices and fulfilling his tithing and offering requirements to God, Cain was doing what was right in his own eyes. Cain made several mistakes. First of all, he was not obeying God's truth in the offering. Second, it was not Abel's fault that Cain was not favored in God's eyes, so he had no right to blame his brother at all. The Lord is the one that told him if he did not well, that sin lies at the door. The next mistake he made was he did not control his emotions but showed some type of temper display. Another major mistake Cain made was in going to the field with his brother while he still felt anger toward him. He should not have discussed the issues with Abel, even if he thought Abel was wrong in some way, until he had cooled down and controlled his anger. Cain in an emotional rage rose up and murdered his brother.

Issues usually are not solved in anger. Most people are not rational enough to reason and deal with issues until they calm down and get over their anger or at least are able to control it.

In verse 7 of Genesis 4, the Lord told Cain in simple language, that if he did not do well that sin was crouching at the door; his emotions and natural nature were ready to dictate his actions. The Lord's command to Cain was to rule over that nature and prevent the sin of which the natural nature certainly was capable. Is that not the battle that every Christian faces on a regular basis? God wants us to be in control through His Spirit working in us and directing our steps.

When we control our emotions, we are able to react to other people in the proper manner and with respect, even if they do things that are offensive. One major way to gain control of our emotions is coming to recognize ourselves, our faults and shortcomings, and all the mistakes we have made in our lives. Through the understanding of our past and present, if we are honest with ourselves, we know just how merciful and long-suffering that God has been toward us. If we can truly understand how this human nature works against us and how hard we have to work against it, it will give us more understanding of others. It helps us to be able to show the right kind of mercy toward others when offenses and difficulties arise, because we understand better what they are going through. This point alone will go a long way in helping us to control our emotions and actions and to be focused in God's true love and kindness. Just as Cain rose up and physically murdered his own brother, if we let our emotions control our actions, it is possible to commit spiritual murder in our hearts toward a brother or sister. If we replace anger with long-suffering, patience, kindness and understanding, we defuse what could be a situation of stress, tension, and conflict.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like . . . (Galatians 5:19–21).

The "works of the flesh" is simply doing what comes naturally—what the feelings dictate for the moment—which will produce unpleasant results. Our first thoughts are usually what the flesh wants us to do and if we act on those impulses they can come under one of the categories in Galatians 5:19–21. The Apostle Paul shows the contrast between serving the flesh and obeying with the help of the Holy Spirit.

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members (Romans 7:22, 23).

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin (Romans 7:25).

Just what does it take to have the emotional character and conversion that will please God? Are we working on this area of our lives, striving to have the right kind of responses, and being able to see the problems on which we need work? Are we controlling our emotions instead of letting them rule our actions? We can have a very right emotional orientation of love and compassion toward God's people and His instructions on how to live this Christian life.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Romans 12:1–2).

We learn what the mind of Christ is like and what He expects of us by reading His inspired word.

. . . Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3–4).

For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word (Isaiah 66:2).

Jesus Christ taught us who the blessed would be in Matthew 5:3–13. Notice verses 11 and 12: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

The prophets and our forefathers all had to face these traits of human nature just as we do today and to be sure they made mistakes. But those we have referenced did not lose hope in those promises given to them, and they remained faithful. They knew that God would deliver them, as opposed to physical Israel who had no faith. We live in a parallel to ancient Israel and the physical promises given to them, and by the same all-

righteous and merciful God we have been given spiritual promises of a new world and eternal life. We must keep our focus and endure until those promises are realized at that Great Day to which we all look forward.

The degree to which we are striving to live this revealed way of faith and righteousness through the presence of God's Holy Spirit will determine the quality of our relationships with our brethren, our mates, our children, and people with whom we deal. In our concluding statements we will let King David show us an example of a true Christian who is in control of his emotional character:

Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?
He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth
in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his
neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor. In whose eyes a
vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that
sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his
money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these
things shall never be moved (Psalm 15:1–5).

It is my strong desire that we use this life as an opportunity for growing and overcoming so that we all make that appointment.

In deepest love, your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leon S. Whitaker". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

Leon S. Whitaker