

Church of God, The Eternal

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Pre-Feast Trials—Learning to Discern the Spirits

September 2004

Dear Brethren:

My opportunity has come once again to send you our warmest greetings from the Philippines. It is a time when the culminating events of the year are at hand—God's fall festivals. We wish you all the blessings that these coming events may bring to you this year.

Experience shows that this time of the year, just before the Feast, unfavorable trials are prevalent to members of the church. It seems that a certain power influences circumstances to come our way just before the Feast. So let us all be careful. Just to mention one or two examples: A certain family last year was tempted to miss a Feast because of worry over a potential health problem. At another time, the brake of the car failed to function and it had to be fixed before proceeding to the Feast site.

As the year-end festivals foreshadow the last days that are now at hand, we experience also the same negative power that permeates our existence and functions in our daily activities. Thus, we need to exert our will and persistence to overcome the negative thoughts, rash and erroneous decisions, false judgments, or unbecoming attitudes before they become habitual. Yet of our own will, persistence, and diligence—without the empowerment from God's Holy Spirit—we could not fully overcome such weaknesses, of which we often think and justify as human nature.

The Gift of Discerning Spirits

One of the spiritual gifts mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:4–10 is the gift of *discerning of spirits*. In these days of confusion, competition and struggle, in both the commercial and spiritual realm, discerning of spirits can be a potent tool for overcoming. We are advised by the Apostle John not to believe in every spirit, but to try them whether they are from God, because many false spirits are gone out into the world (1 John 4:1). Discerning whose

spirit comes to us makes us more alert and strong to overcome. As the saying goes, "Knowing the enemy, the battle is half won."

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12).

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the *prince of the power of the air*, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2) [emphasis mine].

Have you discerned that spirit power in the air? Our Lord discerned the spirit that was in Peter when He said to him, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matthew 16:23).

Let us recognize the reality of Satan the devil, whose spirit can influence our minds, speeches, and actions. Peter who experienced this in the incident just mentioned, likened him to a roaring lion, walking about, seeking his chance to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong used a similar analogy, likening satanic influence to radio wavelengths in the air.

. . . broadcasts—[not in word but in] attitudes, impulses, desires of vanity, lust and greed, jealousy and envy, competition, rebellion against authority. Even when already converted, our human spirit is automatically tuned in to Satan's wavelength.

Yet, as Mr. Armstrong said,

Satan has no power of duress. He cannot force any human mind to submit to the attitude he broadcasts and attempts to instill. Every human is a free moral agent, responsible for his own attitudes, decisions and actions (Herbert W. Armstrong, *The Wonderful World Tomorrow—What It Will Be Like.*)

Hence, the gift of discerning spirits is to be desired and not to be neglected, and to be stirred up for our essential task of overcoming. Lack of it is similar to lack of vision; and with lack of vision, God's people are destroyed.

Brethren, is it easy to discern when Satan attacks us? Can we readily recognize the impressions or attitudes he deceitfully injects into our minds and immediately vehemently refuse them? Or do we entertain them with self-justification—that we are just human and such things are part of our human nature? With our physical capabilities, we could not really perceive spiritual causes and effects; we need spiritual gifts.

In spite of being baptized with others, Simon, the sorcerer (Acts 8:9–29), did not receive this gift and failed to perceive Satan's impressions in his mind; he tried to buy his apostleship with money. But the Apostle Peter was quick to discern this and said, "Thy money perish with thee . . . For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

Satanic Spirits in the Air

Satanic influences in the air are real. They can cause world events to happen at any place, at any time. They are causing wars, criminal acts and terrorism in smaller and in greater degrees. Satan is ruining the family structure and human relationships. He is acting so fast and sure because he has but a short time left. Let us try to recognize him and his scheme in doing his craft.

1. Satan is a *deceiver*.

He has deceived the whole world as having a portrait of one with an ugly look with two horns, fiery eyes, and a long tail. The world does not know that he has the charisma of one who works for peace, the fluency of a preacher of righteousness, and the guile of a teacher mixing truth and error.

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2 Corinthians 11:13–15).

In his craftiness he beguiled Eve by mixing truth and error to make his argument acceptable for her. God told Adam and Eve that they would surely die if they ate the forbidden fruit. Satan lied to them saying, "Ye shall not surely die" and immediately mixed his lie with the truth, "in the day ye eat thereof . . . ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 2:16–17; 3:4–5).

All deception is of Satan the devil, whether it be in doctrines, religious experiences, or impressions and devices. Let God's gift of discernment be developed in us to identify the deceitful approach of Satan or his evil spirits.

2. Satan is the *tempter*.

He tempts the children of God to doubt the truth. He appeals to the strong human emotions such as hunger, desires for power and fame, lust of the body, greed, and other human frailties. He tempted our Lord Jesus Christ to prove His Sonship in the Kingdom of God by

offering to quench His hunger and thirst. He may do likewise to us to inject doubts concerning our awesome human potentials. Unfortunately, he injected among the end-time church leaders *changes* that caused divisions among the brethren. Sadly, the so-called "changes" or "new understanding" are the traditional dogmas, clothed in highly-systematized theologies and philosophies of the brilliant minds of this world.

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain (1 Corinthians 3:18–20).

Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men (Romans 1:21–25).

May we all have the gift of discerning the spirits that comes from one and the same Spirit of God, that we may quickly perceive every spirit that touches our minds, whether it comes from God or from the enemy.

3. Satan is the *tormentor*.

Job was tormented by Satan with painful boils from head to foot, after divesting him of his children and material possessions. Satan will take any opportunity to let the same things that happened to Job happen to us, if God permits. He causes all the ills and miseries of this world. He is the real terrorist, the rapist, the kidnapper—camouflaged in human form. He may cause you to have a feeling of resentment that turns to bitterness, then stress and pressure, or a feeling of guilt; and before you know it you are physically ill, consulting doctors, prone to disobeying more of God's natural laws of healthful living. Satan is the real cause of ills and sufferings, affecting both the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of unsuspecting humanity.

4. Satan is the *counterfeiter*.

Have you ever encountered a problem with counterfeits, like receiving a bogus dollar bill, just to find that it is worthless? You could hardly, or not at all, recognize a bill that is a

counterfeit from a genuine one. There are so many products in the market today that have the same appearance or trademarks, that if you are not careful you can only recognize the genuine from the fake after you have used them. That is another satanic influence in this world.

In religion, the world is filled with counterfeits. More and more people are drawn to groups using the name of Christ (Matthew 24:5), while drawing away from obeying God's commandments—replaced by human traditions and commandments of men (Matthew 15:3). Others are attracted to sounds and imitations of what happened on that Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4), without genuine repentance and change. Satan can even imitate someone's voice through a human medium. Take for example the incident where, through the witch of Endor, Samuel, who was dead, seemed to speak to Saul (1 Samuel 28:6–11).

Brethren, let us not be deceived, but instead have the spirit of discernment in these last days when "all power and signs and lying wonders" are rampant (2 Thessalonians 2:9), trying to dissuade our love for righteousness and truth.

5. Satan is the *accuser*.

He is continually accusing us before the throne of God day and night (Revelation 12:10). Yet he is the one who permeates our thoughts, and forms that same accusing attitude in us if we are not careful. Have you ever found yourself suspecting someone; or in your mind have judged someone for imagined wrong-doing because what is done does not appeal to your personal taste? The Jews suspected Jesus of being a Samaritan and having a demon, then concluded and adjudged Him so, and tried to stone Him (John 8:48, 52, 59). That is how the Devil works in the unsuspecting minds of individuals who cannot discern him. Accusing and judging one another is the Devil's work.

6. Satan is the *spirit of fear*.

"Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee . . . For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." This is the advice of Paul to Timothy, which is also pertinent for us.

Satan capitalizes on that strong human emotion—fear. With the days of great tribulations spreading in wider waves around the world, fear grips our human nature. It can paralyze our spiritual well-being and can render us ineffective instruments of God in the last days. We need to be strong and full of courage to face our spiritual foes. Let us make use of the whole armor of God and bravely overcome the evil days.

Overcoming Satanic Influence

Whenever we perceive satanic influences, let us cast away fear. The word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit, is in our hands. The word of God is alive and sharper than any two-edged sword. Its effectiveness was shown when the Devil tempted our Lord Jesus Christ. When we live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, we live close to Him; and when we resist the Devil, he will flee from us.

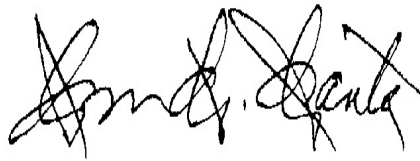
Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you (James 4:7–8).

Another defense from the evil one is love. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18).

In closing, 1 Peter 5:6–11:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Affectionately yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Corsino C. Canta". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial 'C' and 'C'.

Corsino C. Canta