

# Church of God, The Eternal

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## Should Doctrine Be Enforced in the Lives of Individuals?

November 1976

Dear Brethren:

The Feast of Tabernacles of 1976 has come and gone. But what a Feast. Many have personally commented how they feel this was by far the best Feast they have ever experienced regardless of how thrilling and enjoyable some of the very early Feasts were.

We were privileged to experience a kind of love and confidence which came from the hearts—not from deceitful lips. It is easy to talk about love and peace. To the vast majority of churches and institutions as well as nations, they consider themselves the recipients of peace and favor. But true peace, happiness and confidence can come from settled minds and hearts only. There is agony in doubt and misgiving, no matter what may appear on the surface.

The kind of peace and love I am talking about, which we experienced, is that which comes from certitude, confidence and assurance. God has given us a wonderful way of life which we are obligated to cherish and honor. Anchoring ourselves in the firm resolve to be faithful and loyal to the premise of our call, baptism and teaching resulted in the truly unrehearsed joy, brotherly concern and affection which were so unabashedly manifested throughout the Feast at Redmond, Oregon. There certainly was no possibility of counterfeit. For those who experienced it, the results were real.

So many of our difficulties stem from confusion and listening to hearsay. Some feel the need to *critically* evaluate all things. No one should deny others the inalienable right to be sure. But the looming and unresolved question in such an attitude is this: when will these people become sure? When will they know—and know that they know? To some of us the need to prove is not difficult. This is a responsibility which we should have exercised day by day for the past many years. What was once proved, forming the basis of our baptisms and future growth—addition of knowledge which God had not previously revealed—stands eternally proved. To those so endowed with faith and confidence, there is no need to become mentally frustrated, concerned and troubled. They know the Truth. Difficulties and troubles of others do not trouble them with respect to *that* Truth. For Truth

remains eternally the Truth. What a confidence and source of hope and trust. An anchor of life. A way which is not affected by what any man may do or say. This truly is the real source of joy, happiness and confidence. Such joy cannot be taken from those so blessed with that positive direction in their lives.

Yes, we all reaped much benefit from the joy of the Feast. Now the question impressed upon our consciences is this: will we steadfastly cling to that plateau of joy and life achieved at the Feast and then begin to build thereon? Our height of success is of permanent value only if we maintain the stature achieved and in a most positive manner begin to add to it. Real spiritual growth cannot be realized through second thoughts and doubts. Such ingredients are the source of anxiety, misgiving, suspicion and carping. We are well on the road to a better life—a life of immeasurable value in the sight of God—therefore, let us not revert to the human tendencies of yesterday. Once delivered from the distresses of the past, it is folly, indeed, to reach back and revel in that which was mastered, even though for but a brief time. The proof of character is found in continuity of purpose. Let us be completely purposed and determined never to resort to activities of hate, contempt, distrust and suspicion.

Keep your eyes fixed on Christ and His Father. They have given us ample proof of their love and concern. We all experienced it. We all know the way. It is not the way of any man. It is the way of life which we were given. There is *no* other avenue of confidence and assurance. David said, "O how love I thy law!" Should not we manifest the same love for the Truth which God gave us? Indeed, for this very deficiency, the people of our day have lost their way. Paul said, as inspired by God, ". . .they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" 2 Thessalonians 2:10. To truly love does involve the depth of our emotions. Emotions which are controlled through knowledge—the knowledge of that which was given to us.

The Feast of 1976 was truly great and awe inspiring. 1977, if God allows the opportunity to have another Feast, should be even greater if we all take heed to our responsibilities, effect the necessary changes in our lives and add to the pinnacle achieved this year. Working together harmoniously, I know that we shall achieve that lofty goal. God wants us to be the recipients of His maximum love. The degree to which we fall short of that goal will be the internal indication of the degree to which we have not mastered our own natures. Truly such an indication is a revelation—a revelation of our failure to put forth the necessary effort.

I think we have all experienced the ravages of difficulties and trial. We are ready for the quietude of God's perfect way of happiness and joy. Our feet being firmly established in confidence and assurance, God will begin to greatly bless us. These blessings of God can be realized in manifold ways. Let us pray for one another. Let us spend more time on our

knees beseeching the guidance and help of God. Let us sincerely fast and implore God for direction. With the oneness of purpose and love achieved in Redmond, I know God will hear your prayers. His ears are open to our needs. With confidence, faith and purpose realized, the strongest darts of doubt and castigation can be warded off. With absolute faith, there is no way for Satan to begin to destroy and discredit. The future of each of us, rests in the hands of the individual himself. Let us close the doors of doubt and suspicion. The rewards are as great as Eternal Life itself.

Another principle which I would like to write about in this letter distinctly relates to the above concepts. Some have wondered why we do not enforce doctrine in this small remnant group. By actual experience and study some have come to understand. For others, the basics of that understanding will be given here in this letter.

### **Enforcement Antithetic to Character**

Enforcement is antithetic to character. We are free moral agents. God's intent and purpose for each individual whom He calls is this: he must come to respect His word, fear Him and from the heart desire to be obedient. He must daily reach for perfection. He must overcome as knowledge is granted and the necessary power is made available for him to overcome.

The Church is not the Kingdom. It is the assemblage of individuals who have come to love and respect God and His way of life. As such, they will be united in belief and purpose. They will come to intensely hate themselves. They will allow Christ to live His life in them. By the life of Christ being lived in them, they will be in harmony with one another. Christ does not live differently in each individual. He is the same. He is consistent. How he lives in one is the same way He will live in another. We can know that we are His, if we have harmony and agreement. Even in those areas where accord does not exist, it is evident that in process of time such agreement will prevail. The spirit of contention and rebellion does not exist.

Let us understand how this works. Enforcement is coercive action. Such obedience does not come from the heart. All too frequently it, obedience, is manifested in a spirit of contempt and disgust. Physical obedience was the requirement of the Old Testament. Today, under Jesus Christ, God wants obedience from the heart. That is, God is interested in the manifestation of willing obedience because the obedient individual has a love for the Truth and His God. This kind of obedience and action cannot be destroyed by the clever ploys of our arch enemy, Satan the Devil. Coercive obedience has never produced change of heart and mind. It is in this broad spectrum of things that tolerance, compassion and forgiveness play an integral part. But such avenues of kindness in no way indicate

compromise or acceptability. God, who is the perfect character builder, has allowed time—space—for repentance and change. The determination of that "time" element is the responsibility of God solely. Because we tolerate someone who has not achieved a completely Godly standard, it in no way indicates any acceptance of the wrong. On the contrary, in the case of a genuine servant of the Eternal, it is a manifestation of hope—hope that with love and concern, the individual will gain sufficient strength and purpose by which the wrong can be overcome. When conflicts arise, the fault lies with both parties. On the one hand, the one in need of tolerance and help can begin to accept such overtures of kindness as sanction or approval, thereby deceiving himself. But, in the last analysis, he is the loser. Final judgment by God is a living reality.

Then, on the other hand, the one manifesting tolerance and compassion can become so inured to the seriousness of wrong that total acceptance is a likelihood. In such situations, the attitude will manifest itself in an, "I don't care attitude." The problem will be deemed to be the problem of the individual only. Failure to intensely and fervently pray and fast for others distressed and troubled with such problems will result.

Finally, the combination of these two attitudes will produce spiritual retrogression. Then retrogression added to retrogression will result in total departure from God.

### **Role of the Ministry**

What is the responsibility of the ministry? They are held accountable for preaching the Truth—that Truth which God delivered. They (the ministry) must be weighed (by the people) on the balance of faithfulness to that way of life which they were taught. This is not a difficult task for anyone to evaluate. These are the fruits which God requires that you observe in His ministry. Complexity of responsibility, with respect to testing and trying (evaluating), is the subtle ruse of Satan. The member so involved operates in the midst of confusion and bewilderment. Far too many people have lost their orientation because they were attempting to be too judicious and purposeful in the fulfillment of that simple requirement—test and try. Indeed, let us get back to the simplicity which is in Christ. There is great reward in its fulfillment. The ministry must be faithful to its charge to preach the Truth which God gave. The people must be faithful and loyal to the way of life which is taught by God's chosen ministry. Both the people and the ministry are evaluated on this premise.

Why, then, the practice of enforcement in times past? Because there was a common belief that you, the people, were not responsible for your own convictions and beliefs. You were told that all you needed to do was respond to what you were told. That you did not have to pay the price for change or whatever. You were merely held accountable for obedience to ministerial dictates. Let us understand!

Initially, you had to be called by God. There is no other way for you to come to an understanding of the Truth. It was revealed to God's chosen servant. He, in turn, must teach it to the people. God, through the preaching of the word by His chosen servant, would call those predestined to understand. As a result of that call, we responded to the Truth. Then we sought baptism. As a result of laying down our lives, we were filled with the Spirit which God had promised to those obedient to the call. By the gift of the Holy Spirit, we became the recipients of Christ—the Word of God—in you. From that moment on, we could begin to grow—that is, add to that which God had already given to us.

From the day of our baptism on, the awesome responsibility of remaining loyal and faithful to that which God had given was upon us. We could not change it. If we were called, we received Christ. He does not change. If we did not receive Christ, then we were not called to become the recipients of that perfect way of life.

Having been called and granted an understanding of that glorious way of life, we are personally held accountable for loyalty to it. A Christian has a much more serious responsibility than merely complying with whatever he is told to do. From the day of your conversion and baptism, that responsibility will remain yours until your death.

In a word, let us thoroughly understand. When you were called, you heard the Truth and responded to it. The ministry and the called members are both required to be loyal to that Truth. Therefore, if a minister or an entire organization departs, the concerned individual is under no obligation to follow the dictates of those who have departed from the revealed doctrine. In essence, the ministry is held accountable for loyally preaching that Truth which was delivered. And the people are held accountable for consistently practicing that which was delivered to them.

No one in the entire world is forced to obey at the present time. If enforcement were of God, one would have to assume that He does not practice that which He requires of us. He has the power and ability. Why does he not enforce His will upon the whole world at the present time? The answer is quite obvious.

In conclusion, let us realize that heartfelt obedience is what God requires. There is no substitute. When each, because of his love for the Truth, compels himself—and not other—to obey, we will then, and then only, be completely united in spirit and mind. How wonderful and precious is the way of God.

## **God Must Send**

As you all know, we will not aggressively contact any one. Each individual must contact us before we will make any attempt to help him. God must send. That is the way

it has been from the beginning. God has magnificently blessed us in this respect. Many troubled and perplexed people have been sent to us. The avenues by which God sends them have been varied. Regardless of the means, we are grateful for the opportunity of service.

Finally, brethren and friends, we convey our love and respect. Thank you for your courage and conviction. Too few have the courage of any conviction. Most are blindly following men or organizations. They will never again have absolute confidence until the return to the Truth which they once believed and practiced. In that way, and that way alone, is the source of everything which man has ever wanted. It is the source of happiness, joy and contentment. May you ever be strong in that way of life. For only he who endures to the end shall be saved. Do we have that courage, conviction and dedication?

In deepest love and respect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'R' and 'C'.

Raymond C. Cole