

# Church of God, The Eternal

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## Response to a Letter From Pasadena

November 1978

Dear Brethren:

For November, this special letter, dictated by unusual circumstances, must be written. It will replace the sixth of the series covering administration and doctrine. We plan to complete the administration-and-doctrine series next month.

I wish the necessity of writing this special letter had never presented itself. But, silence here would be an abdication of honesty, integrity, love of truth, and all that is patently fair to you and others who may read the recent letter sent from Pasadena—as well as to all who are involved in a struggle to maintain and proclaim God's unalterable truth.

The letter to which I make reference above was written from Pasadena, California, on September 25, 1978. For those who care to KNOW—those who are not afraid of the truth—I wish to point out a number of inconsistencies, errors, and problems related to the letter. I was residing in Pasadena in 1973, during the initial months of traumatic change. By the personal admission of the "author" of the letter, he was not there—at least, not as much as he should have been—during this crucial time in the history of the church.

Before beginning, there are a couple of points which I must emphasize.

One: I am well aware of the respect owed to one commissioned to preach the truth—one to whom God REVEALS the truth and whom He sends with that message. The Bible clearly indicates the need to respect anyone who holds a responsibility designated by God. In a way, we are under obligation to respect Satan—though, most assuredly, we are not to follow him in error. Therefore, I will be pointed and factual about statements made—without engaging in ridicule, personality assassination, or any form of harangue. The facts will speak for themselves. They may not be believed today; but there is coming a day of judgment by Jesus Christ, the one appointed by God the Father. At that time there will be no arguments, either pro or con. His judgmental statements will be absolute.

Two: Those who maintain the truth taught by the called and chosen servant of God, in these last days, demonstrate their love and respect to that servant. Jesus made it abundantly clear that His honor and respect for the Father were evidenced by the fact He remained faithful to the Word which the Father gave Him to proclaim.

Would it have been respect, toward God, for the people of Solomon's day to have followed him into error—a departure from the truth which God had given? Would it have been respect, for the people of Israel to have followed Eli into degeneration and error, instead of pursuing the truth which God had given to them? Would it have been respect toward Christ and the apostles if the true Christians of the first and second centuries had remained a part of the physical organization, instead of holding to the truth which they had been taught by those very apostles?

Respect for the called and chosen servants of God is manifested in *continuous* obedience to those truths which were revealed and proclaimed. Jesus Christ said: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). The Worldwide Church of God possessed the truth—the very Word of God. Thus, logic speaks loud and clear. To remain the servants of God requires *continuous and faithful obedience* to the truth which was taught.

Only by faithfully *continuing* in the revealed way of life can one respect both the servant commissioned and the Eternal God, who revealed the message. By love of the truth and faithful obedience, we demonstrate profound respect for both God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and those servants divinely called and commissioned to proclaim that truth in these last days. Any other premise shows disrespect for all concerned. To *change* with whimsical man is to deny the verity and unalterable character of God. To believe that changes were "necessary" is tantamount to denying the presence of Christ initially.

We emphatically believe that God called and commissioned His end-time servant. We believe that God gave the truth to him, initially, as He has done in all historical examples. Further, we are compelled to believe—on the basis of the recorded Word—that that Word cannot change.

We try to live and practice the same things which we were taught from the beginning. By continuity of belief, we manifest a deep and abiding respect for God and His called and chosen servants.

With these things in mind, let us proceed to the problems mentioned above. They will be thoroughly and objectively covered.

## One Church of God

Pasadena shouts, long and hard, "There is but one Church of God."

We have never doubted that fact. On the contrary, we have most aggressively proclaimed that truth. But, one must understand that such a belief also *imperils those who remain* in that organization which believes itself to be the one and only true Church. How?

The dogmatic statement from Pasadena is probably made out of Biblical ignorance of the condition prophesied to happen to that one, and only, true Church. The intent is to convey the concept that, once called and chosen, one always remains a chosen instrument—that it is impossible for that instrument to depart from the truth or fail to perform the incumbent responsibilities. Is such an assumption accurate? Can it be substantiated by the Biblically revealed facts? All need to stop for just a moment, to remove the blinders of prejudice and honestly look at the factors involved. Let us look at some of those factors!

Israel became a nation by divine decree—foreordained of God (Deut. 32:8; Acts 17:26; Gen. 46:3). They were a peculiar people, called for a significant purpose. They were given a work by God. Though there are many texts by which this can be substantiated, perhaps the best example is found in Deuteronomy 4. Moses was inspired to write, of that chosen nation:

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. . . . Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great . . . that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' Sons . . . (Deut. 4:1–9, parts).

Israel *alone* was called and chosen of God. *They* were the chosen instrument, called for a very specific purpose. They were given a message and told just what their responsibility was.

Did Israel, as the chosen of God, perform according to the divinely revealed will of God? No! The whole Bible is a chronicle of their rebellion against God—and that rebellion manifested itself shortly after they were first given their responsibility. As a result of their rebellion, did they cease to be the nation of Israel? Of course not! But were they faithful servants of God, performing their God-given duties acceptably? Absolutely not! God rejected them and eventually divorced them, though they remained as the nation of Israel and the physical church (Acts 7:37–39; Rev. 12:1–5; John 1:11–12; Matt. 23:1–2) up to the days of Jesus Christ.

Israel, as the Church of God of the Old Testament, did *not* remain faithful to the truth which God had given them (Heb. 4:2). They looked about and decided they wanted to be like the world. They were willing to compromise truth—to pervert the priceless way of life which God had given to them. They *changed* the laws and statutes of God. They perverted justice. They corrupted and polluted the beauty of God's way of life. Because of such perversion, God totally rejected them.

As the one and only nation chosen of God—the one and only Church of God—they could by no means escape God's powerful indictments, leveled against them through the oracles of the prophets. There was no way they could escape the force of God's condemnation. They could not "spiritualize it away" or hide behind some historical interpretation. No, because they were the *one* and *only* nation chosen of God. They were the recipients of God's judgment!

Approximately 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ appeared. He was sent by God the Father. He was sent with a message—the same message which had been previously delivered to the Children of Israel (Heb. 4:2; John 5:39–47).

During three and one-half years, Jesus taught the truth which God had entrusted to Him. He called and trained a body of disciples who were later to become apostles—commissioned with a message. And that message was exactly the same which the Father had given to Jesus Christ, His Son.

During Jesus' tenure here on this earth, He organized the New Testament Church of God. He said to His trainees, the twelve disciples: ". . . upon this rock [Christ, Himself] I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). By this

statement, the twelve disciples were told that a church would be built and that death could not destroy it. It would continue. And the length of that continuation is defined in Matthew 28:18–20. The consummation of the age is synonymous with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, *if the intent* of Jesus Christ's statement is that the *physical body*—the church which He promised to build—should remain the viable and chosen instrument of God, to do the work for which it was established, then the one and only true Church would be the church established under the direction of the apostles in the first century. History abundantly proves the *continuation of the physical church* of the first century. But, the very church established by Christ—and given direction and impetus by the apostles—departed from the truth which had been given. The physical church which departed from the truth became, in process of time, the Catholic Church. Roman Catholics are not without premise for their statement that they are the only true church.

If one believes that once God establishes a church (consider Israel of the Old Testament and the first-century Church of God), it remains the Church of God in a spiritual sense and is empowered to continue the commission—regardless of internal changes and perversion of doctrine—then the establishment of any church today is without basis and approval of God. For, based on this premise, the only church which would be legitimate is the church of the first century, regardless of how much it changed doctrine or perverted and corrupted the ways of God. Honestly, does such rationale make any sense? It goes without saying that *the physical body remains the physical body*. But to assume that because it continues as the physical body, it therefore remains the chosen instrument of God—doing His will—is without substantiation or proof from the Bible and history.

What, then, is the oneness to which Jesus Christ referred? He said there was but one fold (John 10:16). He further prayed that we should be one, as He and the Father are one (John 10:30; 17:11, 21). Paul wrote that there are many members, but only one body (Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:12). How can many members be made one? Paul explains. In Christ, they are one (Rom. 12:5). Christ even prayed that they should be made perfect in one—in Him (John 17:22–23). How?

Paul wrote, in 1 Corinthians 12:13–14: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many." That one body is the Body of Jesus Christ. And, what is Christ? He is the Word of God, personified. Therefore, we were baptized into *the truth*. We were baptized into the *one and only way of life*. And though we were born with minds of independence, by the power of the Holy Spirit we put

on the oneness of the mind of Christ—the mind which was in perfect harmony with the Father. And by that means, we are one in both the Father and the Son. Paul stated it this way: "But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit [mind]" (1 Cor. 6:17).

There is but one body—one Church, the Body of Jesus Christ. But just as an individual can leave the body, by disobedience, so can the entire physical group depart from the faith—the way of life. Our oneness is in mind and heart. This must be true; otherwise, those who were put *out of the church* (physical body) in the times of the apostles would have been forced into a *separation* from Christ. They were forced out of the physical church, but they had not left Christ. God's people have always understood this as a historical fact. Our only problem is in facing the reality of it at *this time of turmoil and strife*. The majority of God's people refuse to face the fact that the conditions which prevail today are a *repeat* of the circumstances which disrupted the church in the days of the apostles—the very conditions foretold by Jesus Christ, prior to His ascension into heaven.

Yes, there was only one Church in the days of the apostles. It was the Body of Jesus Christ. For a period of time, the physical body was the measure and scope of the spiritual body. But in due time, many turned to perversion and corruption of the Word of God. They became dominant and forced the true servants—those who refused to change the doctrine and ways of life to which they had been called—into exile. Sometimes, these true servants had to hide for fear of their very lives. At that time, the physical body was in *no way* the measure of the true, spiritual Body of Christ.

By the early A.D. 50s, the mystery of iniquity was already at work in the first-century Church of God. And by the time the ministry of the original apostles had concluded, the vast majority of the people had turned to perversion and corruption of the Word which had been given to them. Only a *very few* remained faithful to the truth.

According to the rationale accepted by most Church of God members today, the true servants of God should not have allowed themselves to be expelled from the church. They should have changed, along with doctrine, and cooperated with the dictates of "the powers that be" within the church. Is there any way to justify this concept? Brethren, now is the time to *think* soberly and seriously.

There is one physical body. But above all, if that body departs from the truth, those who love and respect the Truth of God should not compromise their beliefs and let their convictions be eroded or destroyed by remaining in the physical church. God expects us to be faithful to the truth which He has given us.

## A Departure in the Last Days

For years, the ministry of the Worldwide Church of God knew, and taught convincingly, that in the last days there would be a falling-away from the truth. The factor which we failed to understand was this: Who would be involved? Or, from what source would the apostasy occur?

Nothing is said about this concept, anymore. However, silence does not change the facts. The Bible clearly indicates a major departure from the truth in the last days! For those who have ears to hear, it would behoove them to carefully and intelligently study the subject of the departure from truth—a departure prophesied to happen in these last days. Emotional reactions and blind subservience will not change the truth God revealed. Why not intelligently look at that truth and act upon it?

Several *Plain Truth* and *Good News* articles were written, over the years, concerning this major departure from the truth in the last days. They were clear, concise, and to the point. No one could mistake their intent. If the people whom God chose cannot accept the contents of those articles because they were written prior to 1972, how can they possibly accept what is written by the same authors after 1972? Even if those writers were ignorant of the truth at that time, does not that fact alone tell us that we should be cautious in accepting them now? Why? Because if they were ignorant of the truth, they should not have been dogmatically teaching what they really did not understand. No one is entitled to preach the truths of God until he is called, chosen, and commissioned by God. And God does not send one who is ignorant of the truth. If they were the chosen servants of God, they were given the truth. If they had the truth, they have no right to change it. In no way can they be right prior to 1972 *and after* 1972. Such an approach makes mockery out of honesty, integrity, and common sense, as well as God's profound Truth.

Regardless of silence at the present time, or the ignoring of past writings, the Bible clearly states there *will be* (or has been) an apostasy. And the term "apostasy" refers to a departure from established (revealed) doctrines. An individual becomes an apostate not by departing from a physical church, but by departing from divinely revealed truths. For, one must first have the truth, before he can become apostate.

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ [the time element is plainly evident, is it not?], and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor

by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand (2 Thess. 2:1–2).

What was the reason for Paul's comments about confusion, doubt, and trouble? To have made the statements which we read in the first two verses of 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul no doubt was warning the brethren of some momentous event which would cause them difficulty *unless* they had faith and really believed the truth which had been given to them. What was that momentous event—an event which would be both mentally and physically troubling? Paul continues:

Let no man deceive you [they had been given the truth, but they were being warned that strong deception was coming] by any means: for that day [the Second Coming of Jesus Christ] shall not come, except there come a falling away [Greek: *apostasia*] . . . (2 Thess. 2:3).

The Greek word, in this form, is used one other place in the Bible. In Acts 21:21, the English word used to translate this same Greek word is "forsake." The term *apostasia* means to forsake or depart from something. What? It is never used to refer to leaving a physical body, organization, or church. It specifically means to depart from, or forsake, the revealed truth—the Word of God. Further, logic tells us that it is impossible to depart from something which one never possessed. Therefore, to apostatize from truth, one must first possess the truth. To even attempt to apply this text to those who remain faithful to the very truth which they initially received, is a manifestation of gross ignorance of the meaning of the verse. One might accuse those who remain faithful to what was first taught by the Church of God of never being called and therefore never possessing the truth—but most assuredly, no one can say these people were initially in the truth and then became reprobate because they did not change doctrine at the time the church changed.

Yes, there is only one Church. It is the Church to which God gave His priceless way of life. But the Bible clearly shows that this very Church would apostatize. Why this one? Because no other church was given the expansive spiritual knowledge which the Worldwide Church of God possessed. And since the Church is one, and that Church possessed revealed truth, they are the only ones who could apostatize. For, if those within the church point a finger at someone else—with respect to the verses in 2 Thessalonians—they are, in essence, saying that they themselves did not possess the truth, but those to whom they are pointing the finger of guilt did possess it. Let us note a few texts which will make this principle very clear.

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times [the last days, our very time] some shall *depart* from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [demons]" (1 Tim. 4:1). To depart from something, one must first possess it. Therefore, the truth—the faith—was initially held, and a subsequent departure occurred. Within this text is found no room for either a so-called progressive revelation or a change of doctrine. The truth is given initially. The departure occurs at a later time.

If the Worldwide Church of God was the one and only true Church of God—and remember, there is but one body, as plainly revealed by the Bible—it must be (indeed, has to be) the *only recipient of this indictment*. The Worldwide Church of God departed from the truth given, resorting to strange and mysterious doctrines—doctrines which are *not* authorized by God. This text will not allow for any explanation indicating a *departure from a church organization*. On the contrary, the only possible explanation is that stated simply—a departure from *the doctrine* which had been given to that body, the one and only true Church of God.

Next, let us notice 2 Timothy 3:1–8. The time element is clearly indicated. Verse one says: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." The following three verses indicate the attitude of many members who were once called and chosen to understand the truth. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (verse 5). The fulfillment of such a requirement is possible only where the problems have arisen within the one true Church—the very church which once held the truth. Do not forget the time to which these instructions apply.

The attitude indicated above is further manifested in activities listed in verses 7 and 8. Paul states: "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith." The truth came first. Resistance and mental corruption followed. Deception and change are seldom well defined. It would be impossible to negatively sway people by effecting a straightforward and honest approach. Rather, the majority are deceived through a pursuit of technicalities ("ever learning")—which results in uncertainty, change, and the loss of faith ("never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"). Why does a continuing need for revision, uncertainty, and change exist? Because these people lose faith—the solidarity of conviction and trust in the doctrine initially given, that way of life which they were taught and for which they were baptized. Because they lack faith in the doctrine which they accepted, they are not willing to stand up for that truth. They are, indeed, reprobate concerning the faith—the belief and trust in the initial doctrine which they were taught.

Again, the Church is one. No one denies that fact. But it is obvious, from the above texts, that the one Church is the *only one* which could change the doctrine and apostatize from it. The truth was first there. For, how can one resist that which does not exist? One cannot be reprobate concerning truth until he first possesses it.

From among many texts, let us note just one more. In this text, both the time element and the conditions are plainly and clearly listed. There should be no misunderstanding on the part of those who will take the time to think and judiciously apply these statements.

Let us note, carefully, 2 Peter 2. Peter wrote:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. . . . While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them (2 Pet. 2:1–2, 19–21).

Second Peter, the second chapter, is a prophecy for *the last days* (2 Pet. 2:1, 3, 9). It is a prophecy for our very generation. We would do well to take careful note of the contents. What is Peter telling us in the above text?

There will arise false teachers. Where? In the Church of God (in the last days)—the one and only true body. Peter said these false teachers would be among "you," the chosen of God. What would be their nefarious and evil intent? To "privily [deceptively—in a manner unnoticed by the membership] bring in [to what? The Church] damnable heresies . . ."

The truth had been taught—in the last days—to the ONE AND ONLY TRUE CHURCH OF GOD. Then, at some subsequent time, because false ministers did not really LOVE the truth or possess faith in that way of life, they introduced heresies—erroneous concepts developed under the auspices of "scholarship." They instituted change—change of doctrine. Change from the revealed way of faith to concepts more acceptable to the world.

What was the result?

The many (majority) of the Church—and remember, there is only one true Church—followed those pernicious ways. They blindly accepted whatever explanations were given. Why? How was it possible to deceive the vast majority of the church members? Peter said: ". . . by reason of whom *the way of truth shall be evil spoken of*" (verse 2). The actual rejection of truth by the majority became possible because of the weight, support, and influence of personality. Someone well known—someone who possessed the authority and control—supplied the necessary influence, impetus, and direction. And, Peter makes it abundantly clear that the departure was from truth—from the very way which all were initially taught—not from a church body, by whatever definition we may give to it.

There is *no* possibility of honestly or correctly applying these texts to members who choose to honor God—to remain faithful to the revealed truth—instead of listening to damnable heresies which were allowed to come into the Church of God. The very reason for the corruption and perversion of the Word of God—mentioned many times in the Bible—concerned those heresies, which were given emphasis and an image of respectability by the backing of a significant personality of power and authority within the church itself.

In order to justify the new, changed doctrines (heresies), the revealed truth was denigrated—"evil spoken of" (verse 2), said Peter. But, how do you think God reacts to such maligning of His Truth—the most priceless gift which could be given to humankind? When the church authorities spurned, rejected, and contemptuously ridiculed the truth, they were ". . . denying the Lord [Christ] that bought them" (verse 1). How? *Christ is that Word*. He is the truth. Therefore, by rejecting the divinely revealed truth, they rejected Jesus Christ.

How is it possible to retain people in an organizational structure where the truth was once fervently and energetically practiced but later rejected? By the use of powerful influence, authority, and personality. But, there was another consideration. Peter said: ". . . they promise them [the members of the church] liberty . . ." (verse 19). But, liberty from what? The whole context of verses 19 through 21 relates to a *human concept of a restrictive way of life*. It is a freedom to return to the things of this world which were previously rejected. Initially, the chosen people of God rejected the ways of this world. But now, by a change of doctrine and the acceptance of a "new way of life," they were liberated from the old "restrictive, hard, and unbending" concepts which they once believed. By this change of attitude, the members of the church actually rejected a way of joy, happiness, abundance, health, and every good thing—and began to label the ways

of God as hard, restrictive, and unbending. What a change in their thinking! As Peter said, they turned ". . . from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (verse 21). To what did they return? To the world—the very way of existence out of which they had come when first called by God. Amazing as it may seem, the very church to which God gave the truth—and the power to proclaim His way of life—rejected the truth delivered to it and began to teach and substantiate a *return* to the ways of the world from which it initially departed. The result? Verse 20: ". . . they are again entangled therein [possible only by a return to that which was once rejected], and overcome . . ."

Yes, there is but one true Church of God—even as there was but one nation of Israel. The conclusion is inescapable. God's indictment against Israel could not be laid at the feet of any other nation. In like manner, the terrible judgments of God against the true Church—for rejecting the truth in the last days—cannot be escaped. For, remember, there is but one true Church. *It is that church which departed from the truth!* Those responsible must bear their guilt. Reason and common sense will not permit any other explanation. There have always been single individuals who did not possess faith—who were not faithful to the call which God gave. But, the consequences were not of such a magnitude to warrant the commission of prophets to warn or indict. Neither would God consume space in the Bible to warn of a few dissidents' leaving the church. On the contrary, He is giving a warning—to those who can hear—of a major defection from the truth, by the church itself. It is simply another apostasy—this time, of the last days—in the long history of apostasies revealed in the Bible.

### **Did We Leave, Or Were We Forced Out?**

Today, many statements are casually or deliberately made in such a way to infer that I left the church voluntarily. Further, the inference is that we would not forgive and forget the "past" sins of some in the ministry. We are supposed to have left with "bitter and hateful spirits." Thus, the intended inference is that we voluntarily left the church because of the turmoil, because of the sins of others, and because of outright rebellion against authority in the church. Statements are made to the effect that some of us were seeking high and responsible positions. That we left because we did not get our way or because our feelings were hurt.

All of the above concepts, statements, or beliefs are untrue. None of the factors mentioned above played any real part in our separation from the church.

It is amazing how some now assume to be able to read hearts and minds, despite the fact the Bible tells us clearly that only God and Christ can read hearts and minds of human beings. People too often impute motives because of a deliberate intent to deceive other people, with respect to the real reasons for a particular action taken. Would we not do ourselves a gigantic service if we sought answers from the people involved—both by word of their mouths and by the fruits which are borne in their lives? Despite the admonition to carefully observe fruits, people all too frequently elect—because of advantage—to believe what they are told by others or by some organization. Such an approach to Biblical responsibility is completely dishonest and is an abdication of duty.

Did we voluntarily leave the physical Church of God? What are the real reasons for our not remaining within the Worldwide Church?

The plain truth is, we did not voluntarily leave the Church of God! We were forced out of the church. Both of us possess letters or memos, written by Headquarters personnel, to substantiate that fact. Despite the claim that we were disfellowshipped from the church with cause, the assertions are absolutely wrong!

If people who *claim to be the servants of God and His Son Jesus Christ* falsify information relative to the disfellowshipping of other servants of God, how can one trust anything else which they may say? Dishonesty *is* dishonesty. A lie *is* a lie—regardless of time, person, or place. The Bible clearly tells us that an honest man will stand by his statements or by the facts, even to his own hurt. If those who are castigating us want to be honest, why have they not asked us directly for explanations, instead of jumping to erroneous conclusions or making emphatic assertions created out of whole cloth?

Again, let me dogmatically state: We *did not leave* the church! We were forced out! How? And why? The answers to these questions will be covered later in this letter.

Many times, we had attempted to get answers, from Pasadena, to the multitude of questions generated because of the changes which were transpiring in the Church of God. A host of technicalities and "maybes" was given; but at no time were we given straightforward, honest answers to the questions which were asked. And finally, out of this atmosphere of uncertainty came the dogmatic statement that we, as ministers, would *have to accept* what we were told on the superior authority of those who made the decisions at Pasadena. This whole concept is a complete departure from the honest and spiritually correct premise—advocated for so many years—of "don't believe me; believe what you find in your Bible." Now, all of a sudden we are being told, "Believe us—don't question our decisions. You will do what you are told. And if you cannot accept what we tell you, *get out of the church.*"

Anyone who presumed to ask any questions, relative to the changes which were taking place in the church, became suspect. His motives and intent were severely questioned, from that time on. He, or they, were very carefully watched from then on.

If the changes were from God, if they were technically correct, and—above all—if they did not violate any spiritual principle, why was there any need to hide behind authority, condemnation of attitude, or the physical parameters of the church? Do not those factors significantly indicate an underlying spiritual *lack of substantiation* for the changes?

With the above facts in mind, let us again ask: Why were we *forced out* of the church? The reasons for which we left are considerably different from those employed by several other ministers who left the organization. And considerably different from those reasons conveyed to the membership of the Church of God.

### **The Issue Not Forgiveness of Sins, but Doctrine**

Beginning as early as the latter part of the sixties, several doctrines of the church began to be questioned; and many papers were written, by various ministers, on those questioned doctrines. Because of this questioning atmosphere and the uncertainty which was generated, some of us began intensive study into the subjects under consideration. During the time of this study, other related concepts came to light. Questions which, though not directly and technically associated with the questioned doctrines, were nevertheless indirectly related and had to be given satisfactory answers. Such questions as: What about divine revelation? How could the church be the true Church of God and have been in error on so many major doctrines for over forty years? What does it mean to be Christian? Is it not the life of Christ, being *lived* in the repentant and called Christian? If so, can Christ change? Does not God reveal the truth to His called and chosen servants before He requires repentance and baptism? Many other questions were generated, which had to be answered.

To these questions, we could get no satisfactory answers from Pasadena. For the most part, we were personally attacked because of the questions asked. Honesty did not prevail. All sorts of allegations and claims, concerning us, were announced from the pulpits across the country and around the world. Since we should not impute motives as to why these allegations were made, we shall leave the final judgment up to God. He knows the reasons or excuses employed, by each, for making such allegations.

What, then, was the real reason for our being "put out of the church"? It was doctrine. Because of the above-mentioned studies, we had come to understand that doctrinal change

was not acceptable to God. We knew that in order for the Worldwide Church of God to be the true Church, it had to possess the revealed doctrine *before* people could be called to the knowledge of the true way of life and be correctly baptized. For, when baptized, the repentant sinner is baptized into Christ. And what is Christ? He is the truth. Thus, logic tells us that we must first have heard and accepted the truth, before we could be baptized into it. And if the truth were given to us initially, why should we allow ourselves to be forced into a change of that priceless way of life? Therefore, when the pressure was put on us to compromise in order to stay in the physical church, the time had come to make a decision—a decision as to whether to remain faithful to the *Word of God* or remain faithful to the *physical* body of the church.

From a purely physical consideration, that decision was the most traumatic we ever had to make. Relative to the spiritual, the problem was not really difficult, because we had faith in that way of life which had been given to us and for which we were presently being tried sorely.

The reason we are not members in the Worldwide Church of God, today, is because of doctrinal changes. Anyone who will be honest will be forced to accept that as a fact. I do not mind being accused because of my belief and faith in the unalterable Truth of God. But, it is much more difficult to accept the *false* accusations of those who would deceive others for personal advantage. Of course, we must learn to take this in stride. For, all who will to honor God—in faithful obedience to the revealed way of life—will be falsely accused and maligned.

At the time of the initial turmoil and difficulty, when doctrine was being changed, those who desired to remain faithful to the truth were not looked upon with too much favor. At that time, most of those ministers and members were told to compromise or leave the church. Because we, as ministers, refused to compromise the truth which we were taught and for which we were baptized, we were *forced out of the church*. Any statements to the contrary are patently wrong. Statements of character defamation will come into judgment at the appointed time. Brethren, we were not desirous of position, recognition, or any other consideration. We only wanted to see the Truth of God maintained. That is all!

It is not our intent to castigate, slander, or attempt to read the motives of others. Time will reveal the true intents and purposes of hearts and minds. For the present, we can accept only that which proceeds from mouths and the resultant action in people's lives. What is made plain by word and action is *not* a matter of guesswork. It is the clear observation of word and action. We should all desire to be judged on the basis of that principle. We should use this yardstick in evaluating situations which transpire in the lives of others.

## **We Do Not Regard Ourselves as a Separate Church**

Let us state once again, emphatically, we did not arbitrarily leave the church! Some of us were literally forced out—given our walking papers. Our only alternative was to compromise convictions and beliefs. Others may not have been disfellowshipped; but by the perversion and corruption of truth, they were forced to make decisions. To remain spiritually sane—to keep any degree of stability and common sense—they were, in like manner, forced to either leave the church or lose all spiritual stature achieved over the years.

Even though we were forced out of the church physically, we knew there was no place—within the pages of the Bible—where substantiation for the creation of a *new church* or work could be found. Only God can raise up a church! Only God can give a specific work to any human instrument. It was obvious that we should not attempt to take any such responsibility into our own hands. Whatever God had in mind for us (for those estranged from the physical body of the church), we could not assume anything. Presumption is all too frequently the downfall of chosen servants of God. The Bible is one long chronicle of commissioned servants' corrupting the Word of God—becoming lifted up in pride and arrogancy, relative to God-given responsibility. Following this manifestation of self-importance and presumption, catastrophe soon fell.

So, we found ourselves cut off from the church because it had compromised the truth. Now, what were we to do? For a period of months, this was an all-consuming question. Being correct, with respect to the truth, did not give us unrestricted rights of action. We had to know what was right and act only within the guidelines of revealed truth—the Bible.

A comprehensive study had proven, beyond the shadow of any doubt, that a called and chosen servant—whether minister or lay member—does not lose his responsibility or "sonship" with God by the mere act of being put out of the church, for whatever the reasons or excuses. Further, it was obvious that a called and chosen member of the Body of Christ does not lose his salvation when he is disfellowshipped or excommunicated from the physical body due to his unwillingness to compromise truth. Neither does a minister lose his credentials—as far as God is concerned—for refusing to compromise. A minister remains a true servant of God *as long as he remains faithful to the truth which he was taught*. The New Testament—from beginning to end—makes that principle clear.

Putting these factors together, it became abundantly clear that we, as ministers, could not establish a church or create a work. But we were still accountable for feeding the sheep. To do anything else was to become a hireling.

Knowing this, we did not—from a spiritual viewpoint—create a separate entity. We do not regard ourselves as an independent church, but as brothers and sisters estranged from the body—which is composed of those yet faithful to God, but unsure and presently incapable of making necessary decisions. In no way does the physical body necessarily represent, in scope and number, the spiritual body of Jesus Christ—as God sees it. We shall see proof of that fact, a little later.

From the inception of this fledgling activity, it has been made clear that we do not regard ourselves as a separate body—a different church. Our very constitution and bylaws are emphatic and precise in regard to this point.

Why, then, are we incorporated?

The physical incorporation was for the monetary benefit of members who could not, or were not allowed to, continue in the physical body of the Worldwide Church of God. From the beginning (in 1975), our purpose was not to establish a separate church. God reads the hearts and minds. He knows our purpose and aims.

We have not aggressively sought one single member. From the beginning, our prayers have been that if God sends interested people, we will help them. Surprising as it may seem, it is our hope and prayer that members will not leave the physical organization unless they make the move for the right reason—that of being faithful to God by holding fast to the truth which they were initially taught. We do, however, pray that many will come to their senses and will have the courage to act in faith on the Word which they heard and for which they were baptized. God has answered that prayer. One of our richest blessings, to this day, is the assurance that God has been the one responsible for sending all who are faithful to the truth and sincerely love His way, honoring Him in purposeful obedience.

What has happened in our day—the twentieth century—is a repeat of what happened to the Church of God in the first century. Early in the history of the first-century Church of God, conditions had so deteriorated that the Apostle Paul had to write:

And we beseech you, brethren, to *know* them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you . . . to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. . . (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13).

It would make absolutely no sense to apply those verses to ministers of pagan churches. Of course, anyone called and chosen of God knew the difference between pagan churches and the true Church of God. But as time progressed, this became more difficult

to determine. It required courage, faith, and total conviction in the way of life to which they were called, in order to know who—among those unequivocally accepted in the past—constituted the true ministry of the Church of God, remaining faithful to and honoring Him. These ministers, only, were worthy of respect as appointed by God. And we, today, live by these same requirements. Regardless of the time period in which they find themselves, Christians must live by every word of God. Therefore, it is mandatory upon us all to make the necessary and correct evaluations, concerning the true ministry, and to continue our faith and belief in the way of life given. We must KNOW who are faithful ministers. This requires an exercise of faith in our initial call. For, the just shall live by faith. To live in doubt and fear until the day of Christ is totally unacceptable to Him. You must KNOW, *now*.

John says:

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church (3 John 9–10).

As the called and chosen apostle of Christ, John refused to *change* the doctrine which had been given to him—the truth which he taught from the beginning (1 John 2:19–24). He remained the apostle of God because he was faithful to the commission—the preaching of the unchangeable truth which Christ had taught him. However, as history reveals, the vast majority of the people turned to the philosophy of the world. These soon became the dominant influence in the church. As a result, the faithful servants of God were put out. Now, let us ask: Were the true servants of God in John's day still in the physical body? Or were they the ones cast out? If they were the ones cast out of the physical body, as John said, then under such circumstances it is not wise to remain in the physical body. For if it were, then John and the others in that day who were cast out of the church were not the true children of God. The Bible clearly reveals that the true Christians were *cast out of the church*—out of the physical body. But, those cast out certainly remained a part of the spiritual body of Christ.

What really counts is the truth. And what is the truth? Jesus said: "I am the truth and the life." He was the physical manifestation of the very Word of God. And that Word is spirit. It was manifested by obedience in the life of Christ, as it must be manifested in the lives of all called and chosen of Him.

Can truth change? We are told that Jesus Christ—the physical manifestation of the truth—is the same yesterday, today, and forever. There is not even a hint of change in Him. And since He *is* the truth, truth cannot change. It is that priceless truth—around which all pivots—that forms the basis for required evaluations and judgment (2 Thess. 3:14–15). The basis for judging and determining who is faithful is not any man or any organization. It is the absolute, unalterable TRUTH of God. That truth never changes. Is it any wonder such knowledge becomes the basis for faith, confidence, assurance, and conviction—conviction of such a magnitude that a true Christian would die before he would change his belief?

John *continued* as God's servant because he was faithful to the truth he had been taught. This is made plain in all three of his later writings—First, Second, and Third John.

Because John remained faithful to the truth, he found himself outside the very physical body which once taught the truth and which, at one time, bore the divine commission of God.

Sometimes, the true servants are *forced out* of the physical body. But not every member has had this decision made for him—a forced decision by being disfellowshipped. Some, because of conditions and circumstances, are compelled to make a wise and meaningful decision for themselves. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate . . . and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:14–18).

We may have been a part of the world before our call, conversion, and baptism. But we certainly were never unequally yoked with it. When we participated in various organizations or churches, we were a part of them. But, Paul is speaking of a situation where some have become unequally bound together. A definite possibility of this condition exists when the true servants of God remain (because of fear and uncertainty) a part of the physical church which no longer believes, teaches, and practices the truth (2 Thess. 2:10–13).

A departure from the truth is prophesied for the last days (2 Tim. 4:1–4; 2 Thess. 2:1–3). It will not be a *minority* which will depart from the God-given, divinely revealed way of life. It will be the majority who will depart, and few will have the courage or be able to logically evaluate and remain faithful to the revealed way of life (2 Pet. 2:1–3, 21; Matt. 7: 13–14).

The true servants of God will be forced outside of the physical body—the church which once taught the truth given to it. On this, the Bible is explicitly clear. But because of disbelief, horrible spiritual conditions which exist, and other impacting circumstances, determining who is faithful will not be easy. Nevertheless, it is a duty which is incumbent upon every chosen child of God (1 John 4:1–3, 5–6). The basis for the evaluation and instructions, relative to this required action, is found in 2 John 4–11.

The physical church remains the physical church—the very church which once taught the truth. At some given time, the true and faithful members of the Body of Jesus Christ will be *put out* of the physical body or *forced out* by circumstances—circumstances of mind and heart—or by the ultimate edict of God.

We are *not* another church. We are a part of the estranged children of God because of conditions and circumstances—conditions and circumstances not of our choosing. Therefore, any attempt to mislead people into believing we are a separate church is done either deliberately or out of ignorance. In either case, this is an incorrect conclusion. For, one should get the facts before he speaks. Each of us is accountable for the words which proceed from his lips.

### **Return to Initial Doctrine—Why?**

Now we are told that personnel at Pasadena, within the Worldwide Church of God, are going to get the church back on track—a return to doctrines of the church *prior* to the changes of 1973-74. Logic compels us to ask why.

The doctrinal changes of 1973-74 were hailed as the great enlightenment of the times—the "coming out of the wilderness" in which the church had been for forty years, the *new* revelation from God, truths now predicated on the best technical sources of scholarship available. We were told, thunderously, that these new doctrines came as a revelation from God. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong wrote that he had learned more new truth in the last five years (beginning in 1972) than ever before. We were completely out of tune with God if we could not see the spiritual veracity of these new truths, which were to lead to physical benevolence for repressed members.

If God had so miraculously moved in 1973-74, giving insight where repression and bondage previously existed, why the present clamor to return to the old doctrine? Does not this "restoration" of the initial doctrine indicate guilt—guilt in several areas? First: Why were the members told, during 1973-74, that the "new enlightenment" was a revelation from

God? Surely, no one can mistake a *revelation* from God! For, the word "revelation" means to make KNOWN—revealed. There is no guesswork involved in it! Second: If the acceptance and subsequent teaching of this "new revelation" were done arbitrarily—because there was no real basis for the doctrinal changes—where is the apology to the people for having deceived them? Presumption on the part of any minister is just as grievous and wrong as presumption on the part of a lay member. Deception is still deception, regardless of its source. Third: Is not the desire to restore *all* initial doctrine an overt admission of presumption and guilt during the turmoil years of 1973-74? Since truth is singular, the church obviously was in gross error at one time or the other. At whichever time the church was wrong, it was culpable before God. The consequences of teaching error (SIN) are real and absolute. Fourth: Does not a return to the initial doctrine openly substantiate the verity of foundational truth—that truth which we were initially taught and for which we were baptized? Fifth: If the continuity of the meaning and purpose of life—as well as the plan of God—were found in the former teaching of the Worldwide Church of God, then the doctrinal changes of 1973-74 are without justification. If, on the other hand, it is the "new enlightenment" that makes the meaning and purpose of God clear, why then should there be a return to what was taught before the doctrinal changes? Sixth: Why the open insults and hostility against those who remained faithful to that SAME truth and who refused to compromise their convictions?

It is most important for us all to recognize the fact that faithfulness to God—manifested in continuity of belief and practice of DOCTRINE (John 8:31)—is the most important and absolutely essential character requirement. When subjected to the test, a Christian must first obey God—be loyal to revealed TRUTH. And, in addition to the previous questions, we should also ask: Did not most fail the test? Were they not first obedient to men and organization, with little regard for God and Christ? Or, does God blind Himself to the verity of His way of life, by paying deference to fallible men? If so, why did many of the chosen servants in times past run into the wrath and condemnation of God as a result of doing this same thing—revising the truth in accord with what *seemed* right to them?

Brethren, the return of the Worldwide Church of God to the initial doctrine is an open admission of presumption and guilt. Further, it is an absolute admission *we* were right. Right, not because of our own integrity or spiritual capability, but because we loved the Truth and had the spiritual courage to live up to it when the majority had forsaken God and His way of life.

An admission of division and chaos—and the preaching of "Christ's *true Gospel*" once again—is an admission of dereliction of responsibility and the fallacy of the "new

enlightenment." How many will blindly follow *again*, not knowing the reasons or whys? How utterly saddening that so many, once called and knowledgeable of the way of character and life, have become mere puppets—pawns on a chessboard, to be moved about by whimsical man! To become pillars in the Kingdom—and to receive the assignment of fantastic powers and responsibilities from God—requires much more character, mental orientation, perspicacity, and faith than evidenced in such *willing deception*, numerical abuse, and *organizational faith*.

To move in a lateral direction is one thing. But how can anyone, once enlightened, return to the faith rejected—doing so on the premise of "new enlightenment"—and still believe in the reliability and verity of the organization and men involved? Has complete blindness enveloped eyes which once knew and understood? We cannot help but wonder what rationale courses these minds!

THINK SOBERLY! Why a return to the doctrine and practices of the church which were initially taught and believed? TAKE CARE—how you respond may involve your future life.

### **Repentance a Necessity**

We have said we would return to the physical body if the doctrine were set aright. But, what is the proof of any real change of heart and mind?

True and genuine repentance should be absolutely required. Why? Because of Pasadena's admission of the necessity to *restore* truth.

To pervert and corrupt the Word of God is a very serious SIN. It cannot be taken lightly. Many servants of God, in times past, paid with their physical lives for being presumptuous and tampering with the Word of God—for failing to remain faithful to call and commission, and consequently destroying the people because of deception.

To follow a man is woefully inadequate. The called and chosen of God must remain faithful to God—as proven by loyalty to and continuity in the way of life which He delivered.

Both the ministry and the laity are guilty, today. Sometimes God allows His chosen people to be tried—tried by a chosen minister's departure from the faith (Deut. 13:1–5; 1 John 4:1–6). Any minister who departs from truth and teaches error is guilty of deception and failure to act as a true shepherd.

When we are guilty, we must recognize that guilt, admit it before God, and tearfully repent. True repentance will manifest itself in a broken heart and a dramatic return to the Truth.

Pasadena's alleged return to the original doctrine is a covert *admission of wrong*. But what God wants is an open, humble, and sorrowful admission of error. There is no way a calculated and *mechanical* return to the original doctrine can be equated with a real return to truth and an acceptable *change of heart*.

Christ, our example—who did not sin—emptied Himself of His divinity and became obedient unto death. Any true servant of God is going to act in the same spirit of humility and concern. Christ did so because He accepted our load of guilt. A true minister—as a fallible man—must, because of his own guilt, admit failure before God.

Anyone who believes that a return to the original truth is mandated must, of necessity, also believe *guilt lies at the feet of someone*. And, guilt cannot be absolved except on the basis of candid admission and confession.

To point a finger of guilt at someone else is not acceptable to God. Once appointed, those assigned—possessing the tools of power and authority—are held responsible by God for what happens. Dereliction of that responsibility cannot appropriately be laid at the feet of anyone else. Saul, in attempting to absolve himself of guilt, blamed the people. When he was rebellious—presumptuous of office and responsibility—he said the people made him do it. But God was not fooled. He knew where the responsibility lay. Other servants have attempted to sidestep guilt, and the consequential penalty, by accusing others. It simply will not work, with God. He knows. He reads both hearts and minds. Those responsible for the confusion in God's Church must be honest and humbly repent. This is what is completely acceptable with God.

When we see that kind of example set before us, the open admission of presumption and error, and the keen desire—without consideration of external, worldly, and political considerations—to dramatically return to the revealed doctrine, *totally*, we will likewise be effecting a return to the physical body.

Is there any chance that such a set of factors may transpire? Not likely. Hopefully, on a personal basis, I would love to see it! Yet, I am compelled to say, I see no such indication in the Bible that the apostate church will restore all the truth and resume its God-given responsibility. Time alone will tell.

## Changes by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's Approval

The September 25, 1978, letter—as well as other letters, correspondence, and publications—led the unsuspecting member to believe Mr. Armstrong did not know the changes were taking place during 1973-74.

Perhaps there were changes instituted which were unauthorized by him. Knowing the circumstances which prevailed in Pasadena and the attitude manifested toward him by many ministers, I would have little trouble accepting that possibility. Yet, the clear and unmistakable intent of his explanation is to infer that the doctrinal changes did not receive his approval.

As indicated earlier, I spent some time in Pasadena during the time of doctrinal unrest. Special Doctrinal Committee meetings were set up for the purpose of reviewing all questioned or "personally objectionable" doctrine. Several meetings were held for the very purpose of airing differences and feelings, as well as making a pretext at Biblical review.

The subject of Pentecost was chosen to open the review of doctrine, because of many questionable and technical difficulties. The review was completed, and the air of change pervaded through much of the ministry. However, I was not shaken at all—for Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong had told me, personally, that he knew God had revealed the truth to him and that nothing was going to change that fact. Also, as a matter of complete substantiation, he told the members of the church at a Pasadena Bible Study that God had revealed these truths to him—and that if he permitted any change, the church would cease being the church and would come to an end.

With those words ringing in my ears, even though I knew what pressure and influence would be brought to bear upon him, I relaxed in confidence. I knew there was no way to change the doctrine.

Can you imagine my complete surprise, when Mr. Armstrong wired back—from Japan—his approval for a change of Pentecost, from Monday to Sunday? At first, I simply could not believe that such approval had come from him. I accepted the fact—not the change, but his approval of the change—only after I saw and read the letter signed by him.

Now, the floodgates for change were wide open. Those who had no love or respect for the Truth were free to begin a mass effort to change *all* questioned and despised doctrine. The next major tenet to be attacked was that concerning divorce and remarriage. Circumstances allowed for a more expedient change of that battered doctrine than its

advocates had hoped for. Surreptitiously, the groundwork was laid and effort expended to dramatize this change at the May '74 Conference. Most of the ministry was aware of the guarded decision which was to be announced. I was one of those who knew only of the plans. Despite the Pentecost change, I knew the dissidents from within could not get a change of the divorce-and-remarriage doctrine past Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. After all, had he not just completed a lengthy book on the subject?

But to my surprise, he willfully and enthusiastically endorsed the change on the opening day of the 1974 Conference. I was literally numb from shock! What had happened to the Church of God?

Other changes received Mr. Herbert Armstrong's endorsement. One was the concept of make-up. Another was birthdays. How many others, I am not sure. But, from the "secret" practices of the ministers, it would appear that approval had been given for a change in the doctrine of healing.

The division generated in the church—which the letter mentions—did not come as a result of "minor" changes, but due to the changes in Pentecost and divorce-and-remarriage. These changes deeply disturbed people all over the country. How, then, can the chaos and problems of the church be laid at the feet of someone else? The one bearing ultimate authority—and giving the final approval—must, of necessity, bear the responsibility. The major things happening in the church—those changes which caused much confusion and unrest—were within the scope of Mr. Armstrong's knowledge. I am sure there were other things happening besides that which had been conveyed to him. But, to this day, I have not heard anyone comment about such trivia. Always, the problems stem from and center around the doctrines of Pentecost and divorce-and-remarriage, with special emphasis on the latter. Liberalism within the church is frequently mentioned. This was observed and *accepted*.

The results of these changes were tragic. What happened?

### **Thousands of People Destroyed**

By a careful analysis of the figures given in the publications of the Worldwide Church of God, one can readily ascertain the FACT that thousands of people were irreparably damaged. They have grown bitter, hateful, resentful, and filled with venom. Of course, they are wrong for allowing such things to happen to themselves mentally. But, at the same time, those who created the situation are also held accountable. God will judge in His own time.

Using the statistics employed for the purpose of constructing physical facilities for the church membership, by 1978 there should be some 150 to 160 thousand attending—in the United States alone. During my last year (1972), while working with these figures, we were planning on 96,000 for the feast that fall. In the period from 1973 to 1978, according to published figures, many thousands of "new members" were baptized. Add to that figure children and other family members, and other thousands must be added to the total. Where are those people now?

From another view, most of the churches about which I had personal knowledge—across the country—are now reduced to no more than 50% of the number who once attended. In some cases, the churches have closed altogether. Where are those people?

From every observation, it is plainly evident that many, many thousands of people have turned from God's Truth since 1973. Why? Who is responsible for their condition? What caused them to forsake their initial faith and conviction?

God says, woe be to any of us who puts a stumbling block in the path of his brother or sister. *Someone is responsible*. It is a very serious matter. Guilt will be borne equally between those who have turned from the truth and those who shattered their faith!

Repentance for this horrendous loss is a must. Imagine putting implicit faith in Christ and then finding that He was a hoax! What a shattering experience! Our relationship with human beings is somewhat similar. We were taught a way of life. We accepted and believed the truth, with our whole beings. Then, as if faith and confidence meant nothing, we were told that we were completely wrong—that what we had come to believe was not truth at all, but the imaginations of a man who did not have a scholarly bent. Few had the courage or conviction to weather this storm. Most simply accepted the faulty explanations, placing their confidence in men and in the organization. Others set aside everything and now believe little, if anything, as a result of the experience.

In either case, these people have been or are being destroyed. Only God can reach down and lift them up out of the muck and mire of doubt and outright disbelief.

When the church held to the truth, the people confidently continued in the way of life. Only as a result of the changes did the thousands depart and turn to selfish pursuits. This fact, alone, specifically indicts those who pressured the changes and those who gave the final stamp of approval.

But, thank God, a few had the courage to remain faithful to the truth, regardless of external pressures. Most of the adversity has come from within the physical church, itself.

### **Ridicule by Association**

Perhaps the oldest form of ridicule is guilt by association. If one wants to make an individual or group look bad, simply list him or the group along with those whose actions are obvious and disapproved.

The real issue is doctrine. By Mr. Herbert Armstrong's own admission, the Worldwide Church of God should return to its original teachings. Therefore, as a group, we cannot be ridiculed and impugned for remaining faithful to the original doctrine. Those ministers who have ridiculed us for our doctrinal stand are now embarrassed. So, they now resort to character assassination. But if character defects are the criterion we should use to substantiate men or organizations, by all means the *last place* we should look for an example is Pasadena. Those who say we are holding this posture because we want a following, or want to be important, or want to be the head of a church, are imputing motives. They do *not* know the mind and heart. We all have faults, brethren, but there is a vast difference between character defects which lead to blatant sin and doctrinal changes, as opposed to personal faults and shortcomings which do not. Let us be honest and look at the doctrinal issue, because this is the real and only issue.

What will be said here has nothing to do with lifestyles, character defects, or any personality quirks. It is strictly limited to doctrine, convictions, and beliefs.

Mr. Armstrong's September 25, 1978, letter lists me (including the estranged brethren) in a list of defectors from the Worldwide Church of God. He writes: ". . . God forbids and condemns going off separately, one being of Paul, one of Apollos, one of Cephas—one of Garner Ted, one of Raymond Cole, one of Ernest Martin, one of Ken Westby."

The immediate impression is that all these groups left the church for the same reasons. That impression is absolutely false. All the others listed *wanted* doctrine changed. In fact, they were the forerunners for the actual changes made within the Worldwide Church of God. If the doctrines finally adopted by the Worldwide Church of God were truly the "new enlightenment"—the revealed Truth of God—these men received the revelation before the Worldwide Church of God did. Was God confused? He must have sent the new revelation to the wrong people.

On the other hand, we believe God gave the truth initially to the church—and it could not have been the true church unless there were a called, end-time servant to whom the truth was given and who was commissioned to proclaim that way of life. Therefore, the instructions of the Bible—*hold fast that which we were taught*—had to apply to us. We are holding to that revealed truth.

May I ask why that difference was not noted? Regardless of the plain instructions of the Bible to hold fast to that truth, should we forsake God in order to be loyal to a man or a physical church?

Next, the impression is left, with all who blindly read the contents of that letter, that we *deliberately left the church* in order to pull a following after ourselves. Nothing is farther from the truth! *We were forced out of the church*. We were told to compromise beliefs, preaching the strange heresy the church had adopted, or be terminated from employment and from the church. Relative to this demand, the Bible was explicit. Hold fast to the truth. This we did.

Finally, the impression is left that we *created or established a separate church*. This impression is deliberately created! From the beginning, we have never regarded ourselves as a separate church. Being put out of the church, either literally or by circumstance, we became estranged brethren because of *our belief of the truth*—truth which Mr. Armstrong, by his desire to return to it, admits was the Truth of God.

If Jesus Christ were the embodiment of the Word of God—the truth—and He could not change, how can we be wrong to hold fast to the truth initially given to God's servant of the last days? For, the only way the Worldwide Church of God could have been the true Church is by having received the unchangeable Word—Jesus Christ, the Truth and the way of life! By our continuing in that way, we continued in the body of Christ, the body of Truth. If this is not true, then not one single person called of God prior to the doctrinal changes was in the body of Christ—the true Church.

We do not mind being condemned for what we believe. But to falsely accuse by association is certainly NOT of God. Is it not time, for those who presently claim to be the servants of God, to be honest? Let them admit the fact we are still doing precisely what we were taught—taught by that very servant himself.

As estranged brethren from the physical body of the church, what are we doing? Is there any Biblical basis for our activity?

## What We Are Doing!!

Part of the arduous and long study, during the turmoil years of 1973-74, was the question of what was expected by God of anyone estranged from the physical body—whether minister or lay member. Should we just disappear into the woodwork of society? Or, were there specific instructions advanced by God and Christ, the author and finisher of our faith?

First, in a general sense, we are given many very pointed commands. Let us note just a few of them.

Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica: ". . . brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions [doctrines] which ye have been taught . . ." (2 Thess. 2:15).

Conditions were bad in Thessalonica. Paul, inspired by God, had to write:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye *withdraw* yourselves from every *brother* [a condition obviously within the Church of God] that walketh disorderly [what was the problem?], and not after the tradition [doctrine] which he received [the time of call and initial acceptance of the truth] of us [God's called, chosen, and commissioned ministers] (2 Thess. 3:6).

Please note carefully the following question: When does one receive anything? Only when it is *first given*. From that time on, the recipient is the custodian of possession or principle. Therefore, Paul is warning the true servants of God—both those in the first century and us today, who must live by every word of God—to safeguard our faith (truth) which we received. How? By withdrawing from every member (2 Thess. 3:6) who does not consistently subscribe to "the faith once delivered"—that which we were initially taught. How much plainer can instruction be? (The question is: Will we act upon it?)

Salvation should be the desire of each one called of God. How will it be obtained? Is it possible to gain salvation by remaining within the physical body of the church, regardless of what is taught—regardless of how many times doctrine is changed? God's Word makes the answer very plain! Paul said to Timothy:

Take heed unto thyself [his character and lifestyle], and unto the doctrine [the revealed truth which Paul had taught him]; CONTINUE in them: for in doing this thou shalt both *save* thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:16) [emphasis mine].

What are we doing? Holding fast to the truth which God's end-time servant taught us. Why? Because we are desirous of salvation. For whom? Both ourselves and those who hear us. We have not attempted to proselytize! We answer the questions of *those whom God sends*. For, only those who come with open minds and ears will hear! Those blinded by organizational deception will not—indeed, cannot—hear.

To a very large extent, those who come for explanations have already made their decisions to leave the Worldwide Church of God. Now, it is a matter of what direction they will take. Would "the powers that be," within the Worldwide Church of God, rather see us refuse to help them remain faithful to "the faith"? Would they rather see them forsaking all—turning back to the ways of the world? Or, in all honesty, would they rather see us help them—keeping them from forsaking all? By manifesting a calloused, hardened, and contemptuous attitude toward us, they are in a sense condemning their own beginning! After all, we are doing only that which they taught us to practice!

Because the conditions of the last days are so bad, God inspired the Apostle Paul to write necessary instructions for Christians who purpose to be faithful and loyal. He wrote, ". . . evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13).

How can true Christians avoid the terrifying problem of deception? There is only one way! Paul goes on to say: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (verse 14). Words do still have meaning, do they not? The word "continue" means to proceed in the same direction, to avoid alteration or change. How can anyone continue in that which he received—that which he was taught—and at the same time change it? An utter impossibility! Further, we know who taught us. We firmly believe he was called and commissioned of God. The proof of that is evidenced in the fact we will not change that way of life! Others prove, regardless of what they say or do, that they do not believe Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was the end-time servant of God—they prove this by their acceptance of change, for the sake of personal advantage. Only in continuity of belief is there positive proof for what we may claim to believe—that he was God's chosen.

Again, Paul wrote to Titus: "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound [unchanging, consistent] doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9).

We are holding fast to that which we were taught as a group of estranged brethren. As ministers, we are teaching and instructing where called upon by those troubled and

perplexed. For, to continue to believe the truth initially taught by the chosen servant of God—and to help those who cry out for that help—is *not* contrary to the will of God. To create a church or establish a "work," except at the specific instruction of God, is contrary to the will of God. We have not attempted to do that.

Our activity and belief can best be summed up by quoting Hebrews 3:6, 14 and 1 John 2:24:

But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.

Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

Permit us to emphatically state, this is exactly what we are doing. How can we be faulted for this course of action? After all, this is what we were taught!

By prevailing circumstances, our faith and conviction are being tried. God allows these trials. We shall count it a joy to be tried for our belief—the faith once delivered. Paul made a very significant statement regarding this trial and its purpose. He wrote to the Jews (including all Christians):

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain (Heb. 12:25–27).

Our intent is to be faithful to God. As ministers, we do not intend to be hirelings. We will continue to teach and help (Jude 20–24) all whom God sends. It is Biblical and it is RIGHT.

## Conclusion

We recognize there is but one church. But that one church, which was commissioned of God and possessed the unchanging truth, has gone into error. Israel forsook God, turning to the ways of the Gentiles. The first-century church, long before the death of all the apostles, had already gone into error—even the "mystery of iniquity" was already at work. Prophecy tells us the church of the last days would depart from the truth. Therefore, if the Worldwide Church of God was the one and only true church of the last days—and we emphatically believe it was—it has departed (apostatized) from the truth. Surely, we do not believe the Word of God can fail!

Even though an apostasy has occurred, no individual has a right to assume responsibility not given or establish a church by his own authority. We are doing only that which God commands us. We are faithful to that which we were taught. And, we are instructing those whom God sends. God, in His own time, must make any other responsibility KNOWN.

If genuine, the return to doctrine initially taught is commendable. However, it must be accompanied by requisite repentance, for Pasadena is chargeable. Changes did not come *from* the people; they were forced upon the people. Since a return to the original doctrine is an open admission of dereliction of responsibility and guilt before God, true and genuine repentance is absolutely indicated.

Thousands have been destroyed—their faith made shipwreck! Responsible individuals within the physical church are accountable. Only by putting the guilt (error) under the shed blood of Jesus Christ, can they escape the severity of punishment indicated for perversion and corruption of the Truth—the Word of God.

Our prayers are that all will repent. That all will return to the truth "once delivered." Time and circumstances, alone, will reveal the results.

Let not those who are honest be condemned by association. We do not mind being held accountable for what we do believe and practice. It is time deception and adverse influence be eliminated from our lifestyle, behavior, and belief. Will those who have abused office and responsibility come clean? God is watching and KNOWS the hearts and minds! We leave all judgment up to Him.

Brethren, all our love and prayers to you. We earnestly desire an interest in your prayers and concern. Let us be faithful to God. Surely there are a few who still love the truth. God has chosen all of us to be faithful. Let us endure to the end—keeping faith and conviction.

In deep love and respect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "In deep love and respect,".

Raymond C. Cole