

Church of God, The Eternal

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Spiritual Lessons From the Feast of Tabernacles

November 1984

Dear Brethren:

How greatly blessed we all were this year. God has just given us the greatest possible Feast of Tabernacles. In all my years in the church I cannot remember a greater Feast occasion. I was only in Bend, Oregon, this year; but from all that I have heard the other areas were equally blessed.

The attitude and spirit which prevailed were miraculous and brilliantly reflected the purpose for which we were attending the Feast of Tabernacles. The purpose and dedication which all of you reflected indicated the level of your will and determination to honor God and His Son Jesus Christ—oftentimes in opposition, I would guess, to the natural inclinations and demands of the carnal minds and flesh. Fellowshiping is a yardstick of our love and respect for God and His purpose being wrought in our lives. Considering that fact, God most assuredly was active and working mightily in your lives. It was good to see the concern and compassion manifested so frequently where need existed. In the name of Jesus Christ, we, as His ministers, thank you heartily for your sacrifice and affectionate response. We personally feel that the spiritual sustenance was above average. Because of much prayer, how can we believe that the sermons were less than completely inspired by God? He alone knows the needs of the hour. He gave us the meat of His Word which we most needed. How thankful we ought to be if we prayed seeking the active intervention of God in this matter. We were blessed in that He heard and gave us much to remember and use profitably throughout the long and difficult winter which is forecast for this year. Let us always remember that God hears and does answer our prayers. He is compassionate and merciful. He cares, always.

Now, finally, let us not forget the many marvelous physical blessings which were given to His chosen people. These are not to be compared to the spiritual; but God knows that we have need of them. Therefore, He is greatly pleased to so bless His children. These blessings received are a living proof of His concern and love.

A Test of Obedience

God is a God of purpose. Being a God of awesome intent, He had something in mind when He required of us obedience. What are those purposes—purposes which we must not forget?

If we attended the Feast of Tabernacles, we showed willingness to obey God. We manifested evidence that His will and purpose are of greater meaning to us than pursuing our own carnal wills. Few explanations will be acceptable to God—explanations about why we could not attend the Feast. No *man* gave the command to convoke before Him. God alone issued that summons. It is man's duty to obey willingly and purposefully. In the day of reckoning, each of us must give to God any explanation of actions taken. Can you stand in the presence of God, in absolute faith, because you were obedient and because you placed no confidence in the flesh or its demands?

By attending, we manifested willingness to put faith and trust in God. We left jobs, families, homes and possessions, and other physical circumstances. We were compelled to maintain trust and confidence for the period of time we were gone. We prayed to God about this need and we felt confidently that He would answer our prayers. And, indeed, He did. From all that we have heard, everyone who attended was greatly blessed in this regard.

Our confidence in God was strengthened. We added to our trust and implicit faith by seeing that what God had promised He was able to deliver. The lesson of faith is being enhanced with every test and experience. Surely the lesson of faith is the first great object lesson God is teaching us. What, in all probability, is the second most significant lesson being taught?

If by our relationship with one another in the Body of faith we evidence our love and affection for God and His Son Jesus Christ, surely such a relationship must be high in the order of priorities. For a period of eight days we were thrown into a very close and personal relationship with one another. Such relationships require us to manifest a great amount of patience, understanding, consideration, forgiveness, and just plain willingness to overlook and forget.

Brethren, our record this past Feast shows that we did sincerely believe in living the true principles of life. We conducted ourselves in a manner that must have pleased God greatly. We became the acceptable lights by which the Truth was brilliantly manifested in the appointed places where we convoked. As the ministry of Jesus Christ, we saw this manifestation. The people of the world with whom we had to come into contact saw it. Even you saw and appreciated that relationship with one another. I am sure God saw it and was very greatly pleased.

We must take heart from our past endeavors and successes. But, we must not rest on our laurels. Now is the time to go forward with ever greater purpose and determination. More about this need later.

Thirdly, we learned to accept whatever God gives without complaining and manifesting any form of misgiving or distrust toward God. God is the Creator of this entire universe. He is the Controller of all that exists—including the weather and other natural conditions.

Ancient Israel wrote lessons for us to whom the Truth was given in these last days. Those lessons frequently revolved around the natural conditions with which they were confronted daily—the lack of water, the lack of food, absence of the one whom God had appointed to lead them, disease and ill health, obstacles to progress, threats from the outside world, and a host of other trying situations. In most of these circumstances Israel failed, if not in all of them. They failed because they had not received the help of the Holy Spirit. They simply did not have faith to believe that God was for them—not against them.

Natural circumstances with which we are confronted are the instruments with which the gift of faith—given via the Holy Spirit to those chosen of God—is tried and proven. The more spiritually oriented we are, the less we become concerned, fearful, and critical of these natural conditions. We accept the fact God controls them all and that He gives to us what He deems necessary for our growth and spiritual good. Rather than to manifest a complaining attitude we should thank God for what He wills that we experience. In a sense, a complaint by man indicates his displeasure toward an action taken by God. He—that is, man—obviously believes that he could and would do a better job of handling such situations. Complaints are a form of human arrogance. Why cannot man learn to accept what God allows, or wills, and thank Him for the experience involved? If we really believed the promises of God, we would not complain or worry about anything physical that we might encounter.

For the most part, we did accept the will of God and manifested an attitude of respect toward Him. The results were seen in the fact God protected us all through any adverse circumstances which He allowed. It is indeed a pleasure—yes, a thrill—to see the hand of God at work in all such situations. Accepting the will of God and trusting Him to see us through all adversity was a great step in the learning process called conversion and mastery of the natural self.

A Foretaste of the Kingdom

As a result of the efforts made by all of you in effecting personal mastery in your lives, we were afforded the magnificent, thrilling, and rewarding experience of living a true foretaste of the soon-coming Kingdom of God. We held the natural inclinations of the flesh and mind in

check, living the true principles of life which we all know and understand but at times find hard to apply because of the dictates of the flesh. We put our trust in God and counted on Him for intervention and help at all times. We sought a deeper relationship with others whom God had called and added to the Body. We truly found value in that personal relationship with others—deriving strength and purpose for our own lives.

In all, we lived a most memorable time—a time which we will not soon forget. That is, those who really lived the above principles will look back with joy and thanksgiving in their hearts. The others will never, I guess, realize what they missed. For joy and satisfaction come from repressing the self and living the holy, righteous way of life regardless of what the physical, natural, carnal dictates of the self may be. Those who catered to the dictates of the self will not know or understand the value of having lived the foretaste of the Kingdom of God for those eight beautiful days. Obviously, those who were badgered by their own natures cannot understand the joy and satisfaction experienced by those whose hearts and minds were in tune with God. To them any thanks to God, any expressions of joy and appreciation, any claims of a rich experience will be doubted, held in contempt, or otherwise evaluated on the basis of their own carnal reactions.

To sum it all up, regardless of the reactions and feelings of others, those who correctly oriented their minds and hearts did taste of the joys and thrills of the future Kingdom of God. In all respects, this was the finest Feast I can ever remember experiencing or about which I have any knowledge. It was a very great blessing from our Father. It was an expression of His love and concern. For those who feel they did not experience such sublime and rewarding joy the answer may be in asking themselves "why?"

Winter Darkness Pictures Man's Existence Apart From God

The seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day of 1984 have come and gone. Where do we go from here? Should we merely return to the routines of this physical life? Return to the natural traits and characteristics of the flesh? How will the meaning of the Feast for 1984 serve you in the months ahead?

Just before the advent of the long, dark days and months of winter, God gave us the Feast of Tabernacles, the time of rejoicing and enthusiasm. Within the keeping of those days comes the vitality, force, strength, encouragement, and inspiration necessary to weather the ensuing days picturing the bleakness of human existence. That dark period represents the darkness enshrouding man before the dawning of the new day—the realization of the true day where no darkness will ever again prevail.

Did each of us derive sufficient life and vitality from the keeping of the Feast to keep the faith and enthusiasm generated there alive during these upcoming months? To keep anything alive requires energy and effort. Living does not come naturally. It is the result of effort and purpose. Death is the state of rest. Let us not die by either failed purpose or slow attrition from neglect. On the contrary, let us live by purpose and determination. We must use the spiritual growth manifested as the stepping-stone to greater achievement and mastery. No matter how hard we labor to effect the necessary mastery in our lives, it will require much mercy and consideration on the part of God for us to make it into His Kingdom. Yet, our personal labors must manifest the level of endeavor that would make one think achievement of that lofty goal was entirely dependent upon the efforts and diligence of the individuals involved. We cannot rest upon a hope of indifference. It is the responsibility of each of you to keep the results of the Feast alive and growing daily.

How are you personally going to keep alive that which was commenced at the Feast? There are at least two distinct and important ways. First, as indicated earlier, you must remember the experiences learned. To remember is to regenerate the same enthusiasm and inspiration. It is reliving the same experiences. Second, spiritual excitement and enthusiasm is predicated on knowledge—knowledge of the will and purpose of God. Therefore, keeping ourselves alive spiritually is a matter of recalling what we were taught. How? By effectively living those principles. Principles put into action cannot be forgotten. They become a living part of us.

Keep your vision and hopes alive all through the dark days of this winter. How? Focus your attention upon the future. By faith the future can become just as real as the present is to us. Remember, today was the future just one day ago. The events of tomorrow will be just as real to us then as the present is to us now. Those events which ought to excite us as we look forward in faith and confidence are these: A) Spring always follows on the heels of winter, B) the return of Christ will follow the conclusion of this time of darkness, and C) the resurrection of those who have died in Christ will occur at the time of the Second Coming of Christ. Keep your eyes fixed upon that future. Do not let the anxieties of the present efface the glory of those future glorious events.

Take charge of your personal life. Regardless of the events and circumstances which we may experience, God will give us the power and capability to endure unto the end if we will in our lives to pursue that rewarding course of action. You cannot hold someone else accountable for what happens to you. God can change circumstances at any time He may choose to so do. If He has not elected to change the circumstances which affect you, you must assume that He has willed that you endure them as a matter of trial and for the purpose of necessary experience.

In conclusion, I simply want to quote a very inspirational portion of the Bible. I will be quoting from the *Moffatt* translation. "Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to talk, slow to be angry—for human anger does not promote divine righteousness; so clear away all the foul rank

growth of malice, and make a soil of humble modesty for the Word which roots itself inwardly with power to save your souls. *ACT* on the Word, instead of merely listening to it and deluding yourselves. For whoever listens and does nothing, is like a man who glances at his natural face in a mirror; he glances at himself, goes off, and at once forgets what he was like. Whereas he who gazes into the faultless law of freedom and *remains*, in that position, proving himself to be no forgetful listener but an *active* agent, he will be blessed in his activity" (Jas. 1:19–25, emphasis added).

Sorry not to finish the subject which I had started in my last *Monthly Letter*. I will hold this until next time providing I can find the time to work on it while visiting the people of God in Nigeria. However I am not really concerned about the inability to finish the subject indicated for this month. I feel a letter asking all of us to refresh our minds regarding the Feast of Tabernacles experience this year is of great and meaningful importance. That occasion will be a great and marvelous event in my life for a very long time. Thank you for making it possible to experience such a blessing from God. You played a significant part in its production. I know God is pleased. Now we must go on to greater perfection. The past is the stepping-stone to the future.

With much affection and love,

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