

Church of God, The Eternal

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Why We Do Not Affiliate With Other Splinter Groups

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Dear Brethren:

Since the original church apostasy more than a quarter century ago, it seems there has never been a time when former members of the Worldwide Church of God—under a number of organized splinter groups—have been more anxious for some measure of reunification or expanded cooperation. More than ever we are seeing appeals to break down walls of separation and embrace once again our former brothers and sisters of the common faith. We are receiving form letters addressed to the "leaders of the churches of God" soliciting feedback on a wide range of administrative and doctrinal views, as well as invitations to participate in "Churches of God Conferences." Is this flurry of activity an indication of a renewed commitment to legitimate unity in the Body of Christ, or the reflection of something else instead?

At first blush it might be natural to believe this appeal is an expression of true love, and that we too should be willing to pursue renewed communications with former brethren in other groups. After all, were we not all brothers and sisters at one time, and do we not yet share many common beliefs with them to this day? Compared with the masses of peoples of the world who are totally separated from any knowledge of the true God, with whom do we share more in common than those who still believe in the seventh day Sabbath and even many of whom still believe in the Holy Days? But what would be required of us to participate in such a collective activity? Any decision to change our direction requires a price. Those urging this spirit of newfound cooperation tell us the only price is forsaking our pride and our determination to remain autocratic leaders of insulated groups. We are admonished to renounce our form of sectarianism they claim Paul spoke against (1 Corinthians 1:10–17, 3:1–10). But is this really what the Apostle Paul was addressing in these passages? To answer that, we first need to recall the factors involved in the initial splintering of that parent body which left us so divided.

When the Worldwide Church of God began to experience serious problems in the early 1970s as a result of political and doctrinal chaos, hundreds and thousands of members scattered to the four winds over ensuing decades. Some left in the first few years, while others separated over time because of intensifying experiences. There were myriad reasons for separation. Many lost faith in church leadership. Certain ones became disgruntled with specific individuals—ministers and/or laity. Others became disillusioned by the failure of prophetic pronouncements. Still others merely grew weary in a way of life that ultimately seemed too difficult, burdensome, and exacting. Fewest of all were probably those who left because they became prohibited from practicing the original doctrines they first received and loved. Yes, there is more than one group today claiming to carry on the original teachings of the church. Yet in waiting to separate until the late 1980s and early 1990s, like the others, they too absorbed serious doctrinal perversions from the early 1970s, which they still defend to this day. No, of more than two hundred groups that ultimately formed out of the parent church, there is only one we know of that truly began as a remnant of members seeking to preserve the foundation of their *original* faith. This is the group that became known as Church of God, The Eternal. There are even a handful of groups who have formed out of fellowship with us, claiming to cherish the original doctrine. Yet their very existence apart from us is proof they value something else—even the "right" of autonomy—more than the actual Truth.

Our Past Is Our Future

Why is it necessary to rehearse the origin of this remnant body in answering the question of cooperation with splinter groups today, twenty-five years hence? It is because the premise of our origin is unlike that of any other group, and automatically dictates our future course. What is that distinction which defines our past and guides our future? A belief in divine revelation! Apart from every other group, we believe our only claim to being part of the Church—the true Body of Christ—is in our having received divinely revealed doctrines through the ministry of a chosen servant in these last days—Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. We also believe the preservation of that revelation was, and is the only legitimate reason for separation.

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 2:13–14).

We never accepted the concept of spiritual growth through repudiation of the former doctrines. "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been

taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). It matters not that the very servant through whom God worked ultimately repudiated revelation himself. Regardless, it cannot have been God's Church if the original doctrines were not given by Christ. Yet all but a few of the other groups have denied this foundational principle by adopting a Sunday Pentecost, and then condoning divorce and remarriage—a gross abomination in the sight of God.

Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. . . . For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away (Malachi 2:14, 16).

When asked for proof of our belief in a Monday Pentecost, we answer *first* that it was divinely given to Mr. Armstrong. "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the *revelation of the mystery*, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25) [emphasis ours]. When challenged for our defense of every other doctrine, we point likewise to the original teaching of the Church as that which came from Jesus Christ.

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which *at the first* began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him (Hebrews 2:1–3) [emphasis ours].

When confronted with new concepts of men based upon technicalities of Biblical scholarship, we categorically reject anything that is inconsistent with that which we first received. "Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers" (2 Timothy 2:14). When ridiculed as foolish and naive for our belief Christ gave Mr. Armstrong exactly the same doctrines as were revealed to Moses and the Apostles, we remain all the more confident Christ is not a liar. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:6–8). We are not without technical knowledge, but unlike other groups, that knowledge is never used to justify change, but merely to support and defend that which was divinely revealed by Jesus Christ in this age.

But why would our convictions concerning divine revelation prevent our communication and association with other groups today who otherwise have similar beliefs? It is because their agenda for facilitating unity is not in returning to our common foundation—those doctrines we all once believed and practiced together in harmony. Instead, they advocate a spirit of tolerance—tolerance for new beliefs they have each adopted, conflicting one with the other. We are asked to focus on those things we still share in common—especially the weekly and annual Sabbaths. Yet for us, such a proposition of condoning a mixture of good and evil is no more tenable than agreeing to partake in rank heathen worship. "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (1 Corinthians 5:6).

We Fear To Be With Them

It is not that we despise our former brethren at all. We love and cherish them as the priceless sheep of God. But that love cannot be used to mask—and thereby condone—the corruption of God's laws. What very few seem willing to admit is that mere acceptance in some form of Sabbaths and Holy Days is not sufficient to receive God's approval.

The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. . . . To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood (Isaiah 1:3–4, 11–15).

In spite of the fact someone sponsoring Holy Day convocations today is actually hated and despised by God, many seem very content to seek linkage with many different groups in the name of brotherly love and fellowship. The idea that our "best efforts" to worship God are always accepted by Him flies in the face of the inspired Word.

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols (Amos 5:21–23).

This tells us someone is even singing hymns and offering special music in their meetings, thinking they are pleasing God, yet all the while He detests their solemn services. Because God says He hates what they are doing, no matter how right they think they are, we tremble at the thought of being anywhere near those cursed assemblies. It is our intense fear of God, and not scorn for God's people, that prevents our association with them at this time.

But how can God be so calloused toward people who are obviously seeking His approval? Can that be Godly love? Even if they do not have everything exactly right, should not God be merciful, knowing that from their hearts they are trying to please Him—doing the best they can with what they know?

Our Former Brethren Know Better

Our God certainly is very merciful and longsuffering, and He is the personification of perfect love. Therefore, the fact He hates the worship services of some of His chosen people must mean there is a deeper problem with *them*, not with God. That problem is the simple fact they *do* know better after all! Anyone baptized into the church prior to 1974 vowed to accept Jesus Christ, walking after His example, and believing that He had manifested Himself in their lives through the ministry of that Body and the doctrines that were then preached.

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. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming (1 John 2:24–28).

Yes, even those claiming they do not know for sure, or are doing the best they can—having accepted corrupted doctrines based on flawed human scholarship—are denying

that Jesus Christ intervened miraculously in their lives and *gave them* His priceless Truth! Rejection of the divine revelation of Jesus Christ is rejection of Christ Himself.

I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because *ye know it*, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also (1 John 2:21–23) [emphasis ours].

It is the very same condemnation ancient Israel received, and that which the church of the last days was also prophesied to repeat:

Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also *I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them*, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and *my sabbaths they greatly polluted*: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. . . . Yet also I lifted up my hand unto them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands; Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols (Ezekiel 20:10–13, 15–16) [emphasis ours].

Yes, that first generation of Israel who came out of Egypt was given the perfect truths of God. They had no excuse for not knowing how to worship Him properly. Yet they were prevented from entering into the Promised Land because they denied that very revelation. Likewise, spiritual Israel—God's Church—has committed the very same sin in rejecting the revelation of Jesus Christ and pursuing instead its own version of truth. If a change in thinking does not occur, these, too, will forfeit their hope of a Promised Land—the Kingdom of God.

Rejection Is Subtle

It is not that the Sabbaths are totally and utterly rejected in most cases. More commonly, they are greatly *polluted*! Israel did not reject all trappings of the Truth. They wanted only to infuse appealing concepts of their own to make it more palatable.

A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts (Malachi 1:6–8).

So too, when we come to believe that Christ either revealed no truth at all, or else revealed a mixture of truth and error (which we have to "grow" out of through our own scholarship), we adopt a subtle, yet deadly twist in our personal approach to worship—one which God hates.

Are We Without Love?

The fact we reject "alternative perspectives" of anyone, and attribute all such to that spirit of antichrist—those denying the sanctity of His revelation through a chosen servant—we automatically invite ridicule and scorn from others. We are said to be without Godly love and compassion, defined in most cases as accepting those who profess all manner of alternative beliefs—allowing that they too are favored by God.

Interestingly enough, Jesus Christ was scorned for exactly the same reason. The Jews did not reject Christ because of His specific teachings, but because He allowed no room for them and their secular concepts along with His.

Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:7–9).

Because Christ spoke dogmatically about *the divine Truth*, they hated Him and eventually crucified Him.

He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause (John 15:23–25).

Therefore, as those seeking diligently to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, we expect to experience the same rejection He did. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

What about this common concept of love, expressed as tolerance of varying doctrinal concepts among "sabbath keepers?" Is this how God defines love?

And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, *as ye have heard from the beginning*, ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son (2 John 1:6–9) [emphasis ours].

Notice then—in the very next verse—the command given concerning fellowship with those who deny that Truth they initially received through a commissioned minister (Christ's representative in the flesh):

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 1:10–11).

This is the instruction of the God of perfect love! Yet He tells us we are forbidden to use *our own* concept of love to condone the behavior of those flagrantly compromising Truth. This is not referring to those who commit sins of weakness. Love, mercy, and kindness is extended to those who are struggling against human nature. But these *admit* their guilt in relation to the perfect laws of God. They do not stand defiantly to justify wrong, claiming it to be right. No, this command applies to those who defiantly profess a brand of doctrine contrary to that which we originally received. Lest there be any doubt we are specifically prohibited from fellowshiping with just anyone and everyone we choose for ourselves, notice these pointed texts:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Romans 16:17–18).

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: *from such withdraw thyself* (1 Timothy 6:3–5) [emphasis ours].

We can choose to ignore or take lightly these direct commands, believing our concept of love is more benevolent than God's, but such a concept *is likewise* a departure from original revelation, and threatens the spiritual stability of anyone who belligerently embraces it.

No, we will not participate in any ecumenical outreach program among the splintered groups who came out of the Worldwide Church of God. We know that in taking this position we will be accused of being arrogant, exclusive, and without the love of Jesus Christ. But the reality is, it is precisely the fact we do love Jesus Christ, and we wholly respect His commandments more than anything else, that we choose to obey Him regardless of the perception among those, who by their own doctrinal perversion, have denied Him.

The Real Agenda?

What is their real reason for seeking alliances among their sister groups after all this time? In many cases, it may be because they have failed to realize their own goal of continuing the work of Mr. Armstrong to reach the world with the message of the coming Kingdom of God. They relish the memories of that glorious work which grew at an average rate of thirty percent each year for decades and touched the lives of thousands around the world. Each group in its own way has tried to claim authority to continue that work, believing themselves to be the standard bearers commissioned to fulfill prophecy. Yet even the most significant of these "works" has proved to be pitiful in its results. Which group is really getting the attention of the world? Who is making the nations sit up and take notice, coming to know that there is a God in heaven who rules from His lofty throne? If any of these "works" are truly God's best efforts to make the world take notice, we must conclude He has miserably failed.

Is it possible the move to create alliances with other groups is an oblique admission of individual failure, and the desire to "try again" with the collective power of their sister churches? What is totally forgotten is that the thing we all once shared, at the time God was blessing His work so greatly, was a belief in the revealed truths! It was those doctrines that bound us together. It was that revelation we *all* once practiced. All attempts today to recapture past glory without the foundation of Truth are destined for failure.

Yet we know God has not failed, and He will not fail! God's Word will not be broken. Yes, there absolutely will be an incredible work before the revelation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, but it will not be fulfilled by purchasing media space on television, radio, and in print. No, this was how God used Mr. Armstrong to call His chosen people—the firstfruits—out of the world. But that major work is past, and we are now in a time of darkness as the majority of God's Church—spiritual Israel—has polluted itself with heathen worship. But that final witness to the nations will be performed, and it will be manifested with great miracles by two witnesses, a mighty angel, and incredible signs and wonders yet to be revealed (Revelation 10:1–6, 11:3–6). The purpose of that great tribulation to come (Revelation 2:21–23) will be to humble God's children to repent of their rebellion, and to make their robes white—returning once again to their first love, the divine revelation of Christ.

In the meantime, we will not arrogate prophetic responsibility to ourselves. God is fully capable of initiating His *legitimate* work at any time He chooses. We are very willing to respond to His instructions. And if we do not respond right away, He is certainly capable of getting our attention. However, in the meantime, we are content to wait in faith for His will, focusing on that which we *know* absolutely is our obligation of work in His service.

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent (John 6:28–29).

While the multitude of other groups presumptuously attempt to do a monumental work for God in this world *without* the foundation of Truth, we will continue to act in faith, preserving the foundation of our calling—the revelation of divine Truth—waiting for God to direct our steps in His service before that great day of His Son's return.

May you hold fast to the foundation of your original calling, and let nothing dissuade you from your first love—that which is *truly* the manifestation of Godly love.

Yours humbly in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the typed name.

Jon W. Brisby