

Church of God, The Eternal

P. O. Box 775
Eugene, Oregon 97440
www.cogeternal.org

Raymond C. Cole
Director
Jon W. Brisby
Assistant Director

Offices in:
United States
Philippines
Switzerland

Unthankfulness—Part II

December 2000

Dear Brethren:

In August, this year, we commenced addressing the subject of unthankfulness. Due to letter page constraints much material was left out of that issue of the *Monthly Letter*, knowing that it could be covered in a subsequent issue. This, now, is the second part of that very significant and imperative subject.

Why did God in the physical type of the church today—the church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38)—require ritualistic sacrifices of thanksgiving? Does it not, on the surface at least, appear that the act of acceptable gratitude and appreciation must be acquired, learned, by a host of physical circumstances? As we saw earlier the natural degradation of men results in incredibly perverse and hateful manifestations (2 Timothy 3:1–8). There has to be a fundamental cause, and perhaps reason, for this universal degradation. In this issue it is our intent to give you more of the cogent information and at the same time mine for deeper meaning.

In the last issue of the *Monthly Letter* we concluded with the concept that genuine gratitude is not a natural inclination. On the contrary, most, if not all, human beings act as if whatever was done for them was not only expected, but required. They owe no appreciation for, or, have respect for anything. This very trait sometimes makes it hard—very difficult—for even the called to respond acceptably.

Do Others' Behavior Mold Your Attitude and Response?

God commands the true Christian, ". . . count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [trials]; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:2–4).

As Paul wrote to the Hebrews, do not be destroyed by such trials but be exercised thereby, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11). Our character and orientation must be made and established by those things which we experience; but, we must never allow such conditions to give evil purpose to our lives. We can be refined by them; or, we can be destroyed by them.

Christ set us an example of the above principle which applies to all people for all times. He said to His twelve disciples:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave *thanks*, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples (Matthew 26:26–35).

The object lesson is clear. Unless our courage is spiritual in nature it is little more than human arrogance and bravado. A single test will reveal the shallowness of such confidence. This, tragically, is the sad state of too many who claimed, or still claim, to be the chosen children of God. As the historical example revealed a genuine defect which needed correction, so does the behavior of many today—those who were dislodged from faith and conviction—manifest a serious defect which needs resolved. Apparently this resolution, for those in whom there is some hope, will yet be corrected by life-threatening experiences. Thankfully, there appear to be some who have learned true, genuine, thankfulness and appreciation for the way to which called without undergoing such tests (Luke 21:36, read verses 1–38).

Remember: Those who genuinely love the Truth of God, will not surrender it for any reason. Those who have little or no love for the Truth will compromise, alter, or change it so as to make it more acceptable to human minds and hearts.

Christ set us a perfect example. Though He knew His life would be ended in just a matter of hours, He never allowed the emotions and volatile reactions of the disciples to sway Him (Matthew 26:26–35). He kept His eyes on the true goal (Hebrews 12:2). His example is a classic manifestation of the love, affection, and thankfulness for truth which we must at all times manifest.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons (Hebrews 12:1–8).

How is such character and self-discipline possible short of a love and respect for something greater than the flesh and its carnal whims? Christians who manifest such courage and conviction evidence ultimate thankfulness. They are not adversely affected by the behavior of others.

How Israel Has and Will Learn

Human nature is evil, hateful, and totally self-seeking. How has God arranged for such beings to learn basic lessons of life? Since God is a purposeful Being, He seeing the end from the beginning and knowing the very unholy and unthankful nature He created in man, must surely have designed a set of circumstances by which the fruits of such nature would be written as object lessons for all mankind. Indeed, He did. Ancient Israel, living in the flesh, wrote indelible lessons for us today—both personally and collectively (1 Corinthians 10:1–11). They were called out of Egypt as a nation, but were never given the ability to become faithful children of God (Deuteronomy 29:1–4). It follows, that the purpose for which God created the nation of Israel was to write the hard lessons of flesh as Paul was inspired to state.

Israel Required to Thank God

What did God teach Israel about thankfulness? Special offerings were offered up as thanks offerings before God (Leviticus 7:11–15). Again, God is purposeful. Why was He teaching Israel to give thanks? Men must be taught to honor and respect God. To love and appreciate the most marvelous gift they could be given—the knowledge of Him, as well as His laws, statutes, and judgments (Leviticus 22:29–33, 2 Corinthians 5:1–14, Psalm 122:1–9). To accomplish the ritualistic habit of giving thanks, by decree from God, a special order of servants was established (Nehemiah 12:1, 24, 40).

Because of David's great love, admiration and respect for God's law he set us a marvelous historical example of gratitude and thankfulness (1 Chronicles 16:1–36). Further, indigenous in this example is a factor which we must not overlook. That is: The very foundation of real, genuine gratitude is absolute loyalty and faithfulness to the ways of God. Conversely, any ingratitude is a manifestation of some, if not total, disrespect for the Truth of God. With this in mind, let us ask: Why such disrespect (2 Timothy 3:1–14) for others in the last days? What we see surfacing among those who once knew the Truth is indifference, and even contempt, for the unalterable truths of God. This characteristic is at the same time enhanced with a growing regard for the things of the world. Nothing remains static. With a diminution of the Spirit of God (Jude 19) there will be an increasing interest in the spirit of this world.

It would do us all well to ponder, once again, the following texts (Hebrews 12:2–29 and 2 Corinthians 3:1–18). As we do, let us ask, are we really thankful for God's ways; or, do we secretly desire some of man's ways—the pagan customs of this world?

A Terrifying Prospect

Unless we learn—and learn well—the lessons of old, is it possible that some face the likelihood of God's powerful intervention? He knows those whom He has called and is not inclined to allow them to continue in the way of demon worship. He called them to obey Him and to be a glorious product of His skillful creation. Read a beautiful analytical recall/prophecy of God's intent for those days leading up to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (Psalms 77, 78, 79, 106). Have the wrong of heart and mind badly tainted the Body of Christ—the plant which God planted in these last days? Was David speaking for the church in the last days when he wrote:

O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps. The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about

Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them. We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us. How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire? Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name. For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place. O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed. Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die; And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord. So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations (Psalm 79)?

At the least, we should and must manifest genuine love and thankfulness for His perfect way of life. How? By "perfect" obedience to His way of life! Let us not, as did ancient Israel, turn to demonic spirits instead of God (Psalm 106:1–48). God will accept only the genuine. The Apostle Paul wrote:

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils (1 Corinthians 10:11–21).

Despite the abundance of warnings, what is the status of the people of God in the last days? As we have seen earlier, some who once knew the Truth have turned to

perversions—corrupting the very Word of God. Indeed, they have turned to demonism (2 Timothy 2). Many years earlier, God said of these same people: "Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. 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" (Isaiah 1:9–14).

The time element is plainly indicated in Isaiah 2:2—the last days in which we are living right now. The very time to which Paul made reference in 2 Timothy 3:1–9. Do not be fooled by the apparent observance of Holy Days. Regarding these very times, God inspired Amos to write:

They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time. Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the *remnant* of Joseph. Therefore the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus; Wailing shall be in all streets; and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing. And in all vineyards shall be wailing: for I will pass through thee, saith the LORD. Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it? 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. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god,

which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts (Amos 5:10, 12–27).

Apparently some are willing to "observe" Holy Days as long as they can "rework" them to configure with the natural tendency to pervert and compromise. But, remember, real thankfulness is manifested in uncompromising obedience to all the will of God—without the adulteration of the ways of paganism given to natural man at the time of Moses (Deuteronomy 4:19, Acts 14:16). Let us repeat: Real thankfulness is manifested in "perfect" obedience—obedience to all God's laws, statutes, and judgments. Yet, careful—very careful—evaluation is necessary. Why? There are some observing the Holy Days who are not pleasing to God. Their very attempt to obey is considered an abomination in the sight of God (compare Amos 5:10–27 and Isaiah 1:9–14).

Thankfulness a State of Mind

One might think people who are daily subject to ridicule, and varying types of persecution would live troubled, apprehensive, and defensive lives. On the contrary, they live for the future with greater hope and aspiration than the temporary foibles of the day. Christ set them an example. It is written of Him, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (Hebrews 12:1–4).

Keeping our eyes fixed upon Christ and aided by the Holy Spirit, the true Christian can live the requirement laid upon him. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:2–3). The biggest problem is that most attempt to make critical decisions at the very time of difficulty. Scarcely ever can an acceptable decision be made at the moment of emotional upheaval and stress. If there exists an intrinsic problem the astute, observant, and well-grounded individual has no difficulty with it. Though he may find the challenge troubling, due to a host of emotional ties, he still can make his decision confidently. The basic foundational premises were determined much earlier. Thus, the only decision to be made at the moment is this: What does he personally do at that instant? For example, I cannot even begin to imagine what would have happened to me at the time of the apostasy if I had been required to decide whether the church was right or wrong at the time of its inception. That matter had been settled at the time of my call and baptism. What I did not know was, what does God expect me to do as a result of what was happening in the church.

As I indicated earlier (above) Christ was not troubled about the decision of purpose and direction. Therefore, He could face His terrible future with joy and purpose. By loyalty, He knew what His future held.

In comparable fashion the Apostle Paul, by the power of the Holy Spirit, could manifest the same courage and conviction. When addressing the people he loved and served, he said, "Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved. But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps? Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying" (2 Corinthians 12:14–19).

In exactly the same way, the true ministry of Jesus Christ wants to serve you, our beloved brothers and sisters. We want no unusual gain. We seek opportunity to spend what God gives to us in acceptable service. It is not our desire to violate the Biblical guidelines which God laid down, however. Because of fullness of heart, we want to do as much as we can, always. In that very orientation is found joy, gratitude, and happiness beyond measure. There simply is nothing like the privilege of serving others. Indeed, thankfulness is a state of mind. Obviously some in the last days—those, as we saw, who once knew the Truth—have lost that happiness—thankfulness—because they have shriveled up mentally and emotionally. The very reason some who crept into God's Church in the last days became covetous (2 Peter 2:12–15).

Real thankfulness is first and foremost founded on a genuine love and respect for God's Truth—that which was given by Moses and to which Christ added that imperative ingredient, faith. Faith is the power by which the called of today can accomplish that which Israel of old could not perform. By contrast to the people of the world—especially those who have gone astray—they live contented, self-disciplined lives of joy, satisfaction, and confidence. They are settled, purposeful people. Regardless of what they face in this evil world they are confident and happy people—thankful for what they knew and for the promise of the future.

God's View of His Creation

The basis of the confidence mentioned above is faith in the will and purpose of God. They know that hate, evil, and unfavorable conditions cannot last long—that they are allowed for a limited time and purpose only. The prophet Habakkuk wrote of these very

conditions. He said, "And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith. Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people" (Habakkuk 2:2–5). Why will God take a quick and firm hand? Habakkuk answers, "Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?" (Habakkuk 2:13).

The man of faith is settled and confident. Even in the darkest hour he can still be joyous and happy. He knows that God in heaven sees all and will not allow evil to continue long. Let us, as the called of God, manifest that faith and confidence. Our God cannot—will not—fail. For the moment we are being tested. It is all for our ultimate good.

The Command of God

With the above as a backdrop and an unmoveable foundation let us see, understand, and manifest the following commands of our God and Father.

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name (Psalm 100:4).

And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful (Colossians 3:14–15).

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them (Ephesians 5:1–7).

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all

wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Colossians 3:15–17).

Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:11–19).

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; (1 Timothy 2:1–3).

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Hebrews 13:12–16).

Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High (Psalm 50:14).

And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen (Revelation 7:11–12).

Note: The faithful angels are profuse in their worship of God and giving of thanks. If we are the faithful of the flesh, should we do less?

To conclude this subject properly, please allow me to finish it with a third issue. I think you will agree the subject matter is worthy of exhaustive coverage.

Again, we, here at the office, extend our deepest love and affection. With God's help you will always remain deeply etched in our hearts and minds. Our prayers and thoughts of kindness remain with you. We covet yours, too.

Your servants in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole".

Raymond C. Cole

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jon W. Brisby".

Jon W. Brisby