

Church of God, The Eternal

P. O. Box 775

Eugene, Oregon 97440

An Open Letter From Raymond C. Cole

Recognizing a person, a concept, an organization, or whatever, is at anytime important. Yet, during times of distress, confusion, or bewilderment such recognition is imperative.

As prophesied Biblically the world today (these last days) is saturated with hypocrisy, lying, deception, and ultimate confusion. It is in this very unstable condition God calls those He wills to obey Him and remain steadfast in faithful obedience. Such direction and confidence are possible if the chosen exercise the responsibilities incumbent upon them. On the other hand, the vast majority—even of those who once knew the Truth—will fall prey to the clever machinations of Satan and his demons. When writing to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul succinctly expounded this principle. He said, "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Corinthians 11:19). He further elaborated when writing to other churches of his day. To the Thessalonican church he wrote, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, 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. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:1–3, 7–12).

What is apparent is this: Deception and confusion are inevitable. This being a fundamental reality, surely God must have made a provision by which some differentiation is possible—for the truly called and converted.

Before addressing the content of the above matter, it is deemed essential to give a little background information. Since Church of God, The Eternal came into existence under the guidance and direction of Raymond C. Cole, allow us to give you an abbreviated history of who he is. For the benefit of simplicity, accuracy, and clarity allow me, please, to use a first-

person approach in this writing. That is, I will use "I" instead of the more general and accepted indirect approach.

Further, to make certain specifics abundantly clear when they arise, I feel it imperative to give you a little personalized history. I beg your forgiveness and understanding.

A Succinct Background

My future maternal grandfather and his brother for unusual reasons became aggressively interested in the Bible at a very young age. As a result of their study they became aware of the significance of Palestine in the scheme of world affairs. They left their parents, and home state of Michigan and traveled to Palestine—while the country was still a mandate of Great Britain. Shortly after arrival in Palestine my grandfather-to-be became acquainted with the daughter of a British journalist.

The two boys continued their Biblical endeavor. They became acquainted with a number of Jewish religious bodies. One, the Essenes, had a considerable influence upon their thinking. That particular group with whom they associated kept "the Passover" on the night of the 15th of the first month instead of on the 14th. They were quite strongly convinced. Consequently, after my grandfather, his new bride, and his brother returned to the United States they strongly believed and continued to keep "Passover" on the night of the 15th. In the process of time I, too, was indoctrinated with the same concept.

Now allow me to bring up another side of the story. It is important to events which will follow.

In the early 1900s a number of ministers in the Church of God, Seventh Day made quite a splash in the states of Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. My father's parents were involved in this response. In due time my father met the daughter of the above returning couple. They were married in the 1920s. My father was farming the homestead which my grandfather had acquired at the time of the "Sooner" invasion of Oklahoma. In 1934 we came through a double-header tornado which struck that part of Oklahoma. Nearly everything was destroyed or killed. For a couple of years my father tried desperately to pull everything back together. It was impossible. He sold out totally, leaving for the state of Oregon.

Due to a growing phenomenon in Oregon, a number of old-time friends of the family had left Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, and Nebraska. Most of them wound up in either Idaho or Oregon.

The phenomenon about which they had heard was the call and beginning of the work of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. He was frequently speaking to groups of Sabbath-keepers who had left the above-mentioned states. Since he was a strong and convincing speaker on the subject of the true identity of Israel, my parents were deeply interested. This was the subject which led my grandfather and his brother to Palestine in the first place.

With the loss of nearly everything and the strong magnet of one preaching that which they had long believed and cherished, my parents sold out, picked up everything and moved west with their growing family. We arrived in Oregon in July of 1936 just about two years after the "work" had commenced. They settled in the small community of Jefferson—near my father's brother and family who had moved to Oregon earlier. Jefferson is situated just a moderate distance north of Eugene where Mr. Armstrong was just beginning the "work" which was destined to become one of the strongest and most vibrant religious works which had ever occurred. From Jefferson we would drive down to the Eugene area for the keeping of certain Holy Days. My parents became closely associated with Mr. Armstrong and were influenced by him. In turn I was deeply affected by his speaking.

In the process of time, graduation from Jefferson High School was approaching. I wanted to continue my education. Looking around for a suitable institution of higher learning I was confronted with the possibility I might not be able to attend a conventional institution of higher learning here in Oregon because I was always left with the impression I would have to attend classes on the Sabbath. Since I would not violate the Sabbath of the Eternal God, it looked like attending college at Walla Walla, Washington—an Adventist college—was my only possibility of continuing my education.

I had graduated from high school in 1945. College was postponed for at least one year hoping I could find a suitable institution to attend. Happily and to my surprise, by 1946 Mr. Armstrong was talking about the necessity of establishing a liberal arts college—out of which, if called of God to that service, would come ministers to feed and care for the growing flock. He had encountered many unsavory conditions trying to find loyal, honest, and dedicated servants to help with the growing need produced by the work which he was doing. The target date was the fall of 1947. That year I became one of the first four students to attend Ambassador College located in Pasadena, California.

For whatever the reasons, Mr. Armstrong seemed to take a very special interest in me. I personally recognized only that I had grown fond of and deeply influenced by his teachings. College, to me, would be a glorious opportunity to acquire greater and greater understanding of what had become almost an all-consuming interest.

Now a point made earlier comes into play. College was going well. I thought I was intensely satisfied. But, by the spring of 1948, I was facing the approach of Passover. Mr. Armstrong being aware of the family belief, made a gentle approach in attempting to teach

me the error of "observing Passover" on the 15th. After a number of rather lengthy discussions on the subject, Mr. Armstrong felt that a truce was best for that year. But the issue was not yet settled. I returned to college in the fall of 1948. The spring of 1949, bringing Passover, inevitably came. That year the subject took on a different dimension. On many occasions Mr. Armstrong had insisted vociferously that God revealed to him the truth he was preaching.

A circumstance about which I am not proud and for which I apologized to Mr. H.W. Armstrong, and repented before God, perhaps will help some to understand the gravity of this matter of divine revelation. I was very much technically oriented. I wanted facts. Logic must rule. Because of these fundamental differences in philosophy, conflict loomed large. Mr. Armstrong was insisting emphatically that God had revealed His truths to him. I, on the other hand, wanted to see tangible and technical proof. The conflict all too frequently took on an ugly dimension. Both of us being very aggressive and vocal, our conversations became strained and cutting. For days Mr. Armstrong continually insisted God had revealed to him that which he was preaching. My concepts respecting Passover—the 14th or 15th, the 31 A.D. issue and other less significant subjects—being stripped away, I was left with a single decision to make. Was I going to protect the self, or was I willing to accept in faith and absolute conviction that which had been demonstrated—divine revelation. One of the greatest psychological releases I have ever experienced came at the moment when I decided Mr. Armstrong was right—God reveals His Truth to a chosen servant. It, therefore, is absolute and cannot change. Now can you understand why I was so troubled by the changes which constituted the apostasy of 1972-74? Can you understand why I will not budge regarding doctrine even now? I fear to compromise. I want only that Truth which is recorded in God's Holy Word and was revealed to an end-time servant (Matthew 28:19–20). I want to help those who love that Truth and sincerely want to walk in that way of life. I do not deceive myself. Satan hates the way of Truth. He will accuse falsely and do anything to discredit. How many will remain faithful and endure to the time of Christ's Second Coming?

After much reading, studying, and praying I had accepted the idea of divine revelation. And, though never discussed specifically, the concept of revealed Truth that could never be changed or altered took on a special meaning to me. I lived with the absolute conviction that the Truth had been given to him and that it could not, nor ever would, be changed. From my study of God's Word I knew that revealed Truth was absolute.

A particular incident at this juncture may prove helpful. I had read extensively from my youth. Over the following years I had read conflicting material indicating the year of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ to be as early as 28 A.D. and even as late as 34 A.D. Yet, Mr. Armstrong was saying emphatically it was 31 A.D. I went to Mr. Armstrong asking about his strong emphasis on 31 A.D. I asked what reference he had used. It turned out he had not gotten his date from any reference work. Yet, he emphatically insisted, the correct

date is 31 A.D. Being very technically and scholastically oriented, I was troubled. Accepting anything on the basis of faith or revelation was incredibly difficult. Yet, somehow I knew the message he was proclaiming was unique. I could not turn away from it. I accepted what was proclaimed knowing God would not leave me in darkness forever. To my surprise, several months later Mr. Hermann L. Hoeh came to me with a German book which listed all the astronomical dates for that period of time. Sure enough, the only year in the span of time mentioned above, which contained both an eclipse and a great earthquake at that time of the year was 31 A.D. As corroboration of the miraculous nature of the event, several years later, a member came to me explaining that the eclipse which occurred could only be miraculous. Why? Let the *Interpreter's Bible* explain: "Matthew omits the statement of Mark 15:25 that Jesus was crucified at the third hour (i.e., 9 A.M.), but appears to presuppose it. The sixth hour is noon and the ninth hour about 3 P.M. The Gospel of Peter [possibly a New Testament apocryphal Gospel] 5:15 reads, 'It was noon and darkness gripped all Judea.' We therefore probably should translate all the land, not all the earth. Luke 23:45 explains the phenomenon as an eclipse. An eclipse is astronomically impossible during paschal full moon, but the evangelists think of a mighty miracle." Volume 7, page 107. In any event, the darkness which covered a significant part of the known world would not have gone unnoticed. It was classified as an eclipse. The factors involved corroborate the veracity of Mr. Armstrong's conviction that the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ occurred in 31 A.D. Further, it was a huge confidence builder to me. What I had been forced to accept in faith was now demonstrable technically. How merciful God is to His chosen when acceptable fear, respect for His Word, and required faith are manifested!

Of imperative significance is this: When the apostasy of 1972-74—incidentally occurring in individual doctrines even before 1972—occurred, only fear of God Himself, and faith in that which had been revealed were sufficient to keep one from faltering and losing confidence in what was believed and practiced.

There is always confidence in numbers. After core doctrines began to be compromised, there was no minister or organization who adhered to the doctrine originally taught by Mr. Armstrong from the beginning. I can say that with considerable assurance for I had diligently looked. All had accepted any change the church advanced, or they simply accepted their own interpretations of the Bible. As difficult as it was, I felt I had no option but to act in faith on that which I had always believed.

The concept of divine revelation was the bedrock factor upon which my faith and loyalty to God stood during the apostasy of 1973-74. More on that subject later.

Secondary Issues

Over the years, during the time of college and my first years of the ministry, certain issues which I thought to be of lesser significance came up. These were issues generated by

college students, the doctrinal committee, and other groups that violated the original teaching of Mr. Armstrong. An example was that of duck meat. Mr. Armstrong had, due to his own experience, always taught that duck meat was unclean. Since that was the original teaching of Mr. Armstrong, I would not accept the change. Divine revelation cannot change. What seemed logical to me—divine revelation—appeared to have little meaning or relevance to others. Periodically, major, as well as lesser doctrines were challenged. I had no idea then how these seemingly insignificant issues would surface decades later to expose those who did not truly accept the concept of divine revelation after all.

Although the subject of Pentecost had become sensitive and divisive even in the 1940s the intensity of the subject was growing in the latter '40s and was also geographically spreading. Unrest had developed in as diverse areas as San Antonio, Texas; Wichita, Kansas; Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; as well as Eugene, Oregon. Satan was intensely at work. He hated the real truth about Pentecost. An alarming effort was made to destroy the fledgling church before trained and loyal ministers could be sent to the growing number of areas across the United States where the Truth was taking root. For a number of reasons, I was chosen by Mr. Armstrong, even before ordination, to go out to these troubled areas and quell the unrest about Pentecost. These defensive measures took me to Portland, Oregon for a year—prior to graduation. My matriculation from college was postponed for one year. These assignments necessitated my understanding the arguments being advanced as well as the premise of divine revelation and the proofs for a Monday Pentecost the church had taught over the years. To this array of weapons I had added a couple of technical arguments which to me were very potent. One was the nature of the Hebrew count (See our article, *Why a Monday Pentecost?*).

What became evident to me, after working with a number of agitated members was this: Once people fall into an argumentative spirit, no longer manifesting a pliable and teachable spirit, all the arguments in the world will not change them. Once there exists a failure to recognize the servant commissioned and the fear of God is lost, the love of revealed truth once heard, accepted, and believed fades, and they cannot be taught. The historical time is irrelevant. How many challenged the Apostle Paul? How many refused to accept Christ as the Son of God, the One prophesied to come? Yet, even the contentious of any given time, to justify the self, will look back and claim a superior orientation (Matthew 23:29–31; 12:28–41).

College Graduation

The first graduation of students from Ambassador College occurred in 1951. As mentioned earlier, I completed my final term the following year in 1952. Though a very limited number of graduates those first years, it was a beginning of a ministry that supported and was loyal to Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. Beginning from that point in time ministers,

writers, and administrative people assumed assigned responsibilities. With such personnel in place it was not long before much of the unrest which had existed for a number of years began to subside. The church grew—in power and influence and in numbers of people who were added to the membership list. Peace, harmony, and a feeling of purpose seemed to prevail everywhere. God truly was blessing His prophesied "work" of the last days (Matthew 28:19–20). The message (gospel) was going out to the people and the called sheep were being fed.

New churches were being established in areas across the United States. In fact, the forward thrust seemed unstoppable. On baptizing tours hundreds were being added to the body. Such trips made a personalized observation possible. People everywhere were listening to the abundance of radio programs available across the country, reading the literature, and studying the Correspondence Course. As those making the baptismal tours observed, the program was widely heard at gasoline service stations, in restaurants, and elsewhere. Most geographic sections of the country literally were blanketed with the sound of "The World Tomorrow" broadcast.

Growth was everywhere. College classes were expanding. The number of students had increased dramatically from the foundation of four who attended in 1947. Some of the original men had already been in positions of responsibility for a couple of years. Mr. Armstrong deemed an ordination ceremony necessary.

Ordination 1952

On December 20, 1952, in Pasadena, California, Mr. Armstrong decided to ordain seven evangelists. The phenomenal growth had made the selection and assignment of specific men essential. Those men were Herman L. Hoeh, Richard Armstrong, Dr. C. Paul Meredith, Rod Meredith, Marion McNair, Raymond McNair, and Raymond C. Cole. All assumed assigned responsibility immediately following this ordination. A number of years later most of those seven with the addition of a few others were given vice-presidential offices. For the most part, those offices were held until the problematic years of 1972–74. During that period of time so many lateral moves were made, men left the church, and other circumstances occurred, it would be difficult to give any accurate assessment of what was what. For the most part utter chaos reigned. The once glorious Church of God had virtually ceased to exist, being replaced by a tragic array of splinter groups all doing whatever seemed right to them. What was the underlying fabric that produced this chaotic condition?

1972-74

In 1972 a major reshuffling of personnel within the church had begun. What was obvious to a number of men was this: There were two different, and for the most part

opposing, sources of authority. The result was fear, distrust, resentment, and acts of rebellion. Few, if any, were attempting to understand just what was happening in the church.

At the same time all this reshuffling was transpiring, serious questions had surfaced about a number of doctrines. These doctrines were being challenged by laymembers as well as ministers. A couple of prominent doctrines, among the many being questioned, were Pentecost and divorce and remarriage. This turmoil had prompted Mr. Armstrong to rewrite completely the old booklet on the subject of divorce and remarriage. That new booklet published in 1973 confirmed and magnified the original revelation. The publication of this booklet created further, and even more intense, opposition from many people—laymembers and ministers. The result was the creation of a new doctrinal committee—made up of evangelists, college instructors, and other better-known headquarters personnel. Overheard frequently were a couple of troubling concepts. They were: 1) "If you can prove anything once you can prove it again." and 2) "Every doctrine of the church was subject to a 'reproving'." These were very troubling concepts to me. I could only reflect back over the traumatic years of 1948 and 1949. Troubling though the orientation was, I settled myself confidently with the mental assurance Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong would not acquiesce to any pressure for change. After all, had he not insisted on divine revelation in 1948 and 1949?

Since there were a considerable number of doctrines seriously questioned, where was the committee to begin? Heard quite frequently on campus was the sentiment, the deliberations should begin with Pentecost because it was the subject most frequently questioned and the fact that many members did not even at that time agree with the keeping of Monday—rather many were already either secretly observing a Sunday Pentecost or were very desirous of seeing a change made officially. It was settled. The first subject to be "reproved" was Pentecost—on which day, Monday or Sunday, was it to be observed?

I (Raymond Cole), being in these meetings, heard nothing that could be considered technical proof for keeping a Sunday. Please recall for a moment, I was sent out earlier to deal with a number of argumentative people regarding Pentecost. I had heard several different arguments which members believed justified their attitude regarding the subject. Interestingly, in the committee meetings, I heard not one presumed fact which I had not heard in those contacts made earlier. Mr. Armstrong did not make the decision to change Pentecost on the basis of new technical information. There was none given. All information presented was that which some of the ministers, at least, had heard over the months. What surfaced was a question on the accuracy of the translation of Leviticus 23:15, "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete:" The emphasis centered on the word "from." Was it to be a part of the count, or was it excluded? In the length and breadth of the meetings little, if any, emphasis was given to divine revelation. But, plenty of scorn was heaped upon Mr. Armstrong. He was not a student, they said. They felt his grasp of history and languages was at best, very limited. The orientation of the discussion was totally "technical." Revelation was relegated to the trash bin.

Considering the premise of the review, it was not shocking that most involved with the committee favored a change from Monday to Sunday. Based on the considerable number of statements made at Bible Studies in Pasadena, to me personally, and other comments over the months, I was absolutely convinced Mr. Armstrong would not favor or allow the change. However, accepting the statement of a translation "expert" that the "from" probably should have been translated as part of the count, he sent word back from overseas where he was at the time, that he would accept the change.

I was shocked beyond belief. What happened to divine revelation?

I, knowing that revelation does not counter the technicality of God's Word, with the aid of another individual, set out to prove that Monday was still the correct day. That work forms the basis of a number of our articles on the subject of Pentecost. Without doubt Monday is the correct day for Pentecost—both on the basis of divine revelation, and the technicality of that which is written. In all cases true and honest research substantiates and supports divine revelation much the same way miracles confirm the truth and work of God. "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen" (Mark 16:20).

True to earlier plans, no sooner had the announcement been made regarding the change of Pentecost with its ensuing trauma and shock waves, than arrangements were being made to address the next issue—the doctrine of divorce and remarriage. I was called at our home in Coquille, Oregon, and asked to continue making my weekly flights back to Pasadena. I refused, saying to the party who had called, "I am not willing to be a part of the dismantling of church doctrine." I did not want to be identified with any changes of the doctrine. Regardless, the meetings continued. In a matter of days vibes were overheard indicating major changes were coming in the doctrine on divorce and remarriage. But I had heard nothing personally.

Since the new auditorium was slated for completion in May of 1974, the ministerial conference that year was postponed until May. That year the college graduation was scheduled for early May. Since our older daughter, Lynn, was slated to graduate, Myra and I drove from Oregon to Pasadena for both the graduation ceremony and the ministerial meeting. For the conference, nearly every minister, elder, and even some lead men in church areas had been flown into Pasadena. Something definitely was in the making. There were, according to my best recall, about 700 men and their wives present for the opening session. The first order of business was the dedication of the newly constructed Ambassador College Auditorium. With these celebratory events out of the way, the conference quickly turned sober and anticipatory. Nearly everyone was deeply concerned about projected doctrinal decisions. The anticipated day came. Mr. H.W. Armstrong began attempting to explain the proposed change for the doctrine of divorce and remarriage. He could not do it. He quickly yielded the floor to his son. You are aware of the information distributed. Succinctly, the conclusion was that many marriages were never marriages and that divorce was acceptable.

To say the least, I was stunned. The preparatory work of the committee had already been written, duplicated, and distributed to all the ministers with the exception of myself. I heard the conclusion for the first time in that fateful meeting. So shocked was I that I experienced one of the severest headaches of my life—for some three days. It was incredulous. I could not believe my ears. The thought flashed through my mind, "Now nothing will be restrained from them." The way was paved. Doctrine after doctrine will fall at the hands of those who had no love for the truth. I knew my days within Worldwide Church of God were limited.

After the conference ended, our daughter, Lynn, having graduated, Myra and I packed up and returned to Coquille. Before leaving Pasadena, however, knowing I could no longer remain in Worldwide, I made a couple of efforts to terminate gracefully my ministerial relationship with the church. I could find no one who would accept my offer. Instead, I was strongly encouraged to go back to Coquille and just continue my Sabbatic. This we did. But I was not satisfied. I knew it was only a matter of time until my location would be uncovered and I would receive letters, cards, and telephone calls asking for explanations about what was happening to the church. How accurate I was in my hunch soon became evident. For a brief period of time, I spent as much as fifteen to eighteen hours a day on the phone. The calls were coming from many areas across the United States, and around the world. Initially I did not have real answers to give to the people. I was not sure what was occurring myself. But, I told the people, if they would be patient, I would find the Biblical answer and would send my findings to them. This was the beginning of a series of studies which I felt would answer the myriad questions being asked by troubled, confused, and angry members. The material from those exhaustive studies formed the basis of much of the literature of Church of God, The Eternal.

At the same time I was doing this study, Myra and I were still driving from Coquille to Eugene—and at times even Portland—to attend services on Sabbaths and Holy Days. We did not know what else to do. For sure, I did not intend to make a move without adequate information on which to base my decisions.

As the study progressed, the picture of last-day events began to emerge. We were seeing the prophesied apostasy ("falling away") of 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Yet, it was further apparent, those prophesied events did not all occur at the same time—a period of time is involved. We know that fact because the Second Coming of Christ has not occurred. That event is the termination of the prophecy of Second Thessalonians two. Since that event has not occurred the conditions and problems leading up to its reality are still ongoing. There are several Biblical texts which address these times and conditions through which the called of God must pass before the return of Christ. These texts had been brought together forming a "road map" by which to observe all past, present, and future activities in the Church and among groups made up of former members. Since these texts are prophecies inspired of God's Holy Spirit it soon became amazing, and even alarming, to observe the accuracy and meaning unfold.

Meetings: Eugene and Portland

For years I had served the people in both Eugene and Portland. I knew the people—the sheep—well. Out of frustration, doubt, and even fear, hundreds were seeking answers. I had made several trips speaking to families and groups who had asked me to explain events, and changes, which were occurring. Inevitably the day came when several wanted to formalize our independent and personalized meetings. They wanted to arrange for a place to meet where all who were troubled could come together to hear and understand and to fellowship with one another. I was very reluctant at first. No man has a "right" to create a separate entity—a body of followers for himself. In my exhaustive study to understand the events of the last days, I had uncovered an abundance of evidence that a number of ministers of these last days would carve out a following for themselves espousing their unique brands of dogma. Plainly God says they are doing what seems right to themselves, but He further says, "I did not send them" (Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel 13, Ezekiel 34, others).

Through the weeks and months of intensive study which had been undertaken, it was obvious that those who willed to remain faithful to the revealed doctrine could not continue to fellowship with those who had departed from that truth. That factor was clearly understood. But, what was I supposed to do? I was very familiar with Christ's warning against hirelings. Now I was between a rock and a hard place. I did not dare establish a work of my own. Only God has the right to establish and commission a work. On the other hand, I did not dare forsake my ministerial duty. It is absolutely impossible for me to put in written form the fearful trauma which I experienced during that period of time.

The Test

Many people here in Oregon, and across the country continued to urge me to speak, write, and publish my convictions. They were troubled, confused, and deeply distressed. I wanted to help them with the knowledge I was gaining from very intensive studies—backed with much praying, and beseeching of God. As strong as the desire to serve was, I was still more concerned about taking any action unauthorized by God. Anyone who really takes the time to study God's Word and allow it to sink down deep in heart—fearfully respecting it—knows he cannot legitimately appropriate office or assume a commission to do a work. Any such activity must come from God. It must be His Work. He alone calls, and commissions.

In my studying I had uncovered the fact that there not only was an emphatic statement by Christ that He and the message which He taught would continue until He returned, but that the body—the church—would go apostate and only a remnant would remain faithful. That discovery gave me considerable courage and hope. I knew that God had Himself

indicated there would be a remnant. One small group who would remain loyal to the original teachings of Christ. I had already come to understand and truly appreciate the fact the message which Christ taught would be proclaimed by someone just prior to His Second Coming (Matthew 28:19–20).

But, all the above did not completely solve the problem of what I was required to do. In desperation I had decided to pull a Gideon. I, in my prayers, told God if He really wanted me to serve His people, if He would send members from both Eugene and Portland the following Sabbath, I would consider that an indication it was His will for me to serve them. (All previous contacts were made by my driving to Eugene and Portland.) That following Sabbath I was amazed to see the arrival of carloads of people from both areas.

The Church Forms

Based on my understanding that a remnant only would continue to exist until the return of Christ, I was adamant about the fact we were not a separate group—only estranged brethren. Our lawyer was informed of this concept at the time of incorporation. He personally told me he understood exactly what I was saying.

Before the actual incorporation I had addressed in prayer a couple of things with God. Being aware of the apostasy of the church in the last days and seeing and hearing the anguish, sorrow, and fear generated by those changes, I had attempted to impress upon God—and perhaps myself—the desire and fact no future departure or change would be accepted or permitted within the body of Biblical doctrine which had been revealed. I simply could not see myself allowing the people to go through once again what they had already experienced. Little did I realize, at that juncture, just how clever our archenemy, Satan, really is. Nearly every act of kindness and concern for others can be perverted, twisted to defame and ridicule. What was even more shocking was the willingness of those who professed to believe the truth to accept and believe the lying perversions which were being circulated. May God be merciful to them. It is not my purpose here to be specific—using names and other indicative material. On the contrary only concepts and principle will be addressed.

No "Work"

Based on three distinct concepts, I was very much aware that the creation of a "work" was contrary to the will of God. First, all early ministers had been taught and knew well no individual has a right to appropriate to himself a "work." Only those called of God and divinely commissioned are authorized to perform such a work. Such a work must be of God. Does He not have the right to call and commission whom He pleases? Secondly, several

ministers and other men had left the church and were attempting to perform a "work." The result was bedlam—a world of confusion. Anyone listening to them would have been made to wonder. On the surface all seemed to sound pretty much the same. Yet, each was stoutly inferring he is the only right one. And now that "time" has passed, several of these supposed "works" are defunct. Did God fail? Or, was this failure merely an evidence of an initial presumption on the part of those who believed themselves to be doing a work? Further, where is the indication, Biblically, that a major work by a chosen servant would follow the apostasy prognosticated for these last days? Are not these conditions, perhaps, part of the reason for the concise and powerful statement of Christ, "This gospel shall be preached unto all the world and then shall the end come"? Being objective about the matter, it seems almost impossible, if not absolutely impossible, for any man to proclaim successfully the gospel message during these traumatic and perverse days. Is it possible that is a part of the reason for the fact that message will be proclaimed by the two witnesses who are yet to come on the scene and for the fact a mighty angel must yet proclaim the everlasting gospel? Add to the above the fact Israel in captivity will contribute to the proliferation of that message.

The third reason we did not establish a "work" is found in the prophetic condemnation of some presumptive individuals who appropriate to themselves works in the last days (Ezekiel 13 and Jeremiah 23—prophecies for the last days).

Where God wills to establish a work, backed by His power and authority, it will occur and it will accomplish the purpose for which it was established.

All presumed "works" today are pathetic. Further, for the most part the original message is not being proclaimed. What God accomplished through His end-time servant, Mr. H.W. Armstrong, was awe-inspiring. He spoke the same message that Christ taught. The same message that the Twelve Apostles taught. The same message which the Apostle Paul taught. That message was exactly the same as God gave to Moses. Compare the following: Hebrews 4:1–2, John 12:47–50, John 5:43–47 and Matthew 28:19–20. How many of those who had appropriated themselves the commission of a work were proclaiming the same message Mr. Armstrong initially taught?

My Promise to God

After nearly eighteen months of study many concepts became very plain. The faithful who had come through the apostasy of Second Thessalonians two were under obligation to remain faithful to that which Mr. Armstrong had taught initially. What God had revealed to him was truth. It would not be compromised, changed or altered in any way. In my feeble way, I had tried to assure God that if He willed that I help these confused and troubled sheep, I would not deviate from that way of life which had been proclaimed first to Adam, then Moses, the prophets, Christ, the apostles—including Paul, and finally to a chosen servant in

these very last days. The Bible is a historical chronicle of man's failure to remain faithful to any charge or responsibility given. Being deeply convicted by this undeniable fact, I personally did not want to see my name added to the list of unfaithful servants. There was absolutely no one else across the country, and to my knowledge around the world, who was even attempting to adhere to the truths revealed and taught by God's end-time servant. I had attempted to find someone who still believed and practiced what we had believed and taught for nearly forty years. There were other groups, but, not one which was still practicing the revealed truth. That fact of itself was a grievous shock to me. I remember wondering, "Did anyone believe the truth over the years?" I later realized there were individuals isolated and scattered across the United States and around the world who still believed. What a joy to find each one.

At the same time I became aware of a few small groups usually rallying around either some favored concept or some specific individual. None faithful to the Truth which all had originally believed and preached. It was amazing to me how quickly "the called" can lose conviction. But it was not long before I was forced to face firsthand the fickleness of such members.

Back to my promise to God. In my prayers—seeking both the will and substantiation of God—I had expressed my determination to remain faithful to God. I knew what I had accepted was the Truth of God. I knew, also, truth cannot change. That basic concept was driven home while in my first years of college. Though I had no broad concept of what the future held for me, I knew I did not want to mislead anyone. Knowing that many hundreds would be calling, I felt compelled to come to specific conclusions about the unalterable truth and my relationship to it. I did not initially plan to be a separate entity. In fact, I urgently tried to get members to remain in the church but to be absolutely faithful to the Truth which they had accepted at the time of baptism. This effort proved futile in a matter of weeks. Seemingly, people cannot remain faithful to the Truth while at the same time abiding in a body which is not teaching that way of life. Most either soon accepted the perverted doctrine which was taught or they simply disappeared from the Worldwide landscape altogether. My efforts, consequently, seemed to be so useless. Many calls coming yet, bundles of cards and letters, but all efforts seemed to be of little value.

It was on the basis of the above I felt compelled to present the test mentioned earlier. The results were startling. I felt I had to help the people in some way. So, if God wanted me to be a servant of the people, I was willing to teach them and to set an example of faithfulness in my own life. Earlier God had made it very clear He did not intend for me to go back into the field of construction. I had tried that avenue because I did not want anyone to say, legitimately, that I went into the ministry for a paycheck. I had enough training growing up so that I knew I could make a living in this world on my own. To make the story short, God had other plans. He made the fact plain in short order. Based on that experience, along with other circumstances, I laid out the test mentioned earlier. Being very fearful of

going contrary to the will of God, I made every effort to see His hand and direction before proceeding. I was convinced God gave His approval. I, therefore, was willing to step out in faith. If God sent the "sheep," I would serve them. I had come to the conclusion no one was authorized to do a traditional "work." But, I felt comfortable doing that work mentioned by John (John 6:29). I wanted to shore up the belief and faith of those who had been called but were shattered by their recent experiences.

Challenges From the Beginning

Only by experience do we at times learn hard but necessary lessons. I have always desired to take people at face value. I assumed, therefore, that anyone who came to us did so for honorable purposes—with a sincere desire to help the scattered and traumatized sheep. How wrong I was! Almost from the beginning, some ministers and other more prominent men in the last days of Worldwide, before the apostasy, came, with conflicting purposes. All, over the years, came with exalted opinions of their "rights," ideas of position and authority, and conflicting ideas of what God had revealed as His doctrine for these last days. The expression I heard all too frequently was "we are all equal." I was troubled by these comments. But, please remember I was, due to fear of and respect for God very cautiously and gingerly feeling my way administratively. Frequently I reminded myself, "I want only what God wants. I want to be absolutely obedient to my God."

From all appearances, these men were not interested in serving troubled sheep. They were more interested in serving themselves. In every case a small group was carved off from the body—a group formed apparently to sustain that particular minister. Tragically, with rare exceptions, these members were left eventually to die spiritually. No wolf cares what happens to the sheep. Through stealth and cunning he separates out a manageable number for the kill. His purpose is to use for his own evil gain.

The above scenario has been played out several times in the last 25 years. There were those who for personalized purposes came into the Church of God, The Eternal, then after a brief period of time began a subtle campaign to induce others to follow them. As mentioned earlier, at the beginning of my endeavor to serve and help people to understand what was happening in the body which went apostate, there was not one other person who stood for the truth which had been taught for forty years. I say that reluctantly, but it is absolutely true. I had carefully looked—even at some groups which had already departed from Worldwide. I know of none that had not compromised the Truth in some way. Through my intense study to determine what was happening, the knowledge of a "faith once delivered" had become most apparent. In fact, that faith became a foundational premise. As indicated of the Apostle Paul, he said he had not attempted to build on any other man's foundation (Romans 15:20). Having carefully looked at differing activities across the nation, I knew there was not another group who really believed and were still practicing that truth

which we all had believed, accepted and practiced in the past. I had hoped deeply there was such a group. I would far rather have found someone who was already acting in faith. But, alas, there was none.

The concept of the "faith once delivered" became foundational to me. It was a foundation accepted by no one else. Tragically, however, we have encountered too many who have presumably accepted it initially only to pervert, change, and/or argue about it years later. They hang on to elements of the concept but in time introduce changes and reinterpretations of their own choosing. This is exactly what God said would happen. At the present, we have seen four or five who made a profession of believing, only to depart from the revealed way of life under some perverted banner. With the exception of the last departure which has just recently occurred, the leaders of the rebellion from the Truth have all suffered at the hands of God. They were ill-fated. Prophecy makes it clear, even the last one mentioned above, is destined to suffer at the hands of God.

As previously mentioned, all who have challenged the verity and authenticity of this fledgling activity have claimed equality. All wanted equality, but only in areas they coveted—position, power, and recognition. I found no one who earnestly sought to perform more of the work, for opportunities to make greater and greater sacrifices for the members. It is significantly apparent God has allowed these spurious activities for reason (1 Corinthians 11:19, 2 Thessalonians 2:6–12). If we cannot be faithful and loyal to a way of faith given to us, how can we qualify to be His servant rulers in His Kingdom?

Our Purpose Remains Unaltered

What God gave to Moses, He gave to Christ. What Christ taught to the apostles, He commissioned them to proclaim in their designated areas. What Christ and the apostles taught was the same as was revealed to Paul. And what all those servants taught is exactly what was given to an end-time servant (Matthew 28:19–20). For those who will hear, our purpose is to honor and proclaim that same way of life—the faith once delivered. In that way is found no part of the way given to Gentiles—people of the world (Deuteronomy 12:1–3; 4:1–40, Acts 14:16). We want the ways of God. We are not interested in any of the traditions or customs of this world. God's servant of these last days at no time made the pagan customs of this world a part of the doctrine. The spirit which introduces change, and/or a relaxation of the doctrine is as much at work today as it was in the past. The called of God must be on guard incessantly. That spirit is a deceiver. He will do anything to destroy.

One concluding observation seems to be necessary. Those who believed and loved the Truth of God have remained strong, loyal, and faithful. On the other hand, it seems that everyone who was "argued" into acceptance of the "faith once delivered" has failed

ultimately. It, indeed, seems like God is separating those who believe and love the Truth from those who must surely have accepted only on the basis of their own personal intellectual prowess.

Conclusion

Satan and his demons hate the ways of God. They will do anything to disrupt, challenge, and destroy. Such behavior is a manifestation of who and what the true people of God are all about. They persecuted Christ. In like manner they will do the same thing to those in whom Christ lives. The faithful of God will count it a privilege to suffer for the cause of righteousness. They will be persecuted and lied about with abandon, but these chosen children of God will know who they are. They love the Truth and will for no cause allow themselves to turn from it. They are the ones who will endure to the end.

Who are we? We are estranged members—a remnant (Romans 9:27–33; 11:1–5, Isaiah 1:8–9, Revelation 12:13–17)—from the apostate body (2 Thessalonians 2:1–3) who sincerely love God's revealed Truth from the heart (2 Thessalonians 2:10), willing to remain faithful to the end (Matthew 24:13). That Truth which was taught by Christ (John 14:6; 12:48–50), that Truth which Christ commissioned the Twelve Apostles to teach (Matthew 28:20). Which was the same message taught by the Apostle Paul (Galatians 1:6–16, 1 Thessalonians 2:12–14). Which was the same message taught by an end-time servant (Matthew 28:19–20). Which had significant beginning with Moses (Hebrews 4:1–3). The Truth which is now obeyed from a spiritual premise (2 Corinthians 3:1–11).

These are the people that God's true ministry desires to serve. It is our purpose to give you our energy and our love.