

May 20, 2009

To Our Dear Elder Brethren and Fellow Believers in the Lord,

Loving greetings to each of you in the name of our Lord Christ Jesus, whose suffering, death on the cross, and shed blood made salvation for us all possible.

We have each in our own time heard the call of the Lord unto repentance. With a broken and contrite spirit, we sought Him in tears and found forgiveness for our sins and peace of heart. By the grace of God, we daily endeavor to walk in peace and in the faith unto which we were called. We cannot yield to a different faith and doctrine than that which we have embraced with our "first love."

With deepest love and humility we share our heartfelt concerns regarding certain doctrinal issues which have risen up among us. We do not lightly address these matters, but through much prayer and humble submission to the Holy Spirit do we share our grave concerns. With a simple faith in Christ we live our lives to His honor and with a singleness of heart do we serve Him, not regarding our image or status among men. The thing we hold most dear is our standing in the eyes of God. We are constrained and cannot compromise God's will in our lives by accepting the following false doctrines and erroneous practices embraced by those outside and inside the Apostolic Christian brotherhood.

In Defense of the Faith

Reasons for this treatise

- Express beliefs
- Clarify false doctrines and practices
- Defend the faith

1.a. Eternal Security, Once Saved, Always Saved, Sinning Daily

To address the doctrinal beliefs which are being challenged in the Apostolic Christian Church, we must first examine a central doctrine which is embraced by many in nominal

Christendom. The false doctrine of eternal security or once saved, always saved, represents a core belief which has many tentacles leading from it (see points 2-6 below). This doctrine is not new, but was devised many centuries ago, to justify man's continual living in a sinful state.

The eternal security belief embraces the thought that salvation cannot be lost and the person is a saved sinner, which leads to the belief of "we sin daily." This is contrary to the words of Jesus in John 5:14 - "Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." Living a sanctified life (Acts 20:32), shunning worldliness (Titus 2:12) and all ungodliness, is not important to the person who feels a false security in his salvation, who does not believe that he can fall.

1.b. Faithfulness and Overcoming Sin Is Essential for Salvation

In direct contrast to eternal security, we believe that the true believer is called to live a life free from sin (John 5:14, John 8:11) by the strength of God-given grace. Through Christ, God re-created man into a new creature which could overcome sin (II Co 5:17). Whether knowingly or unknowingly, the Apostolic Christian Church in some places is rapidly drifting into and practicing aspects of eternal security (see points 2-6 below).

According to Revelation 3:5, living a faithful life of inner purity and overcoming sin is necessary to remain in the Book of Life. We believe that a person who willfully sins a death sin after baptism has fallen away and is no longer saved unless repentance yields God's mercy.

We cannot accept the doctrine of eternal security and its practices. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid? (Rom 6:1-2)

2.a. Christ's blood covering past, present, and future sins

If a person believes that Christ's blood covers a person's past sins, his present sins, and his future sins, he feels secure in his salvation. The door is open to careless living with no real reason for needing to overcome sin. This path leads a person back into sin and he denies the essence of the Lord's coming to this earth, which was to give man freedom and power to overcome sin.

2.b. Christ's Blood Removing Past Sins

Contrasting the above doctrine, we believe that when we felt the burden of our sin and sought the Lord in repentance, we became broken (Mat 21:44, Luke 20:18) and of a contrite spirit. Through faith, Christ's blood removed our sins... "and their sin and iniquities will I remember no more." (Heb 10:17) How can future sins be forgotten before they are committed? He created a new heart within us, clean (Ps 51:10) and free from sin. God's Word says Christ died once and we cannot crucify the son of God afresh for additional forgiveness (Heb 10:5-27, Rom 6:10). Therefore, we cannot believe that he who has truly been converted and willfully sins a sin unto death can again take Christ to the cross and crucify Him a second time (Heb 6:4-5). Applying the blood of Christ to future sins of a believer is to embrace eternal security, which we cannot do.

Even though there are Elders in the Apostolic Christian Church who openly confess that they believe Christ's blood removes all sin, we cannot accept the belief that present sins (committed by a person not overcoming at present) and future sins (committed by a person not overcoming in the future) are removed by Christ's blood which was shed only once. (Rom 3:24-25)

3.a. Faith Alone

The doctrine of eternal security strongly embraces faith alone, implying that works are not necessary. Believers who walk obediently by the Word, denying themselves of a worldly appearance and lifestyle, are told that these works are not needed for salvation.

Only faith is needed. The believer who wears modest attire, forsakes worldly activities and desires to live a holy and sanctified life is increasingly viewed as being self-righteous, even by some within the Apostolic Christian Church.

3.b. Faith and Works

Faith alone will not get us to heaven. The true believer is active in good works of obedience and faithfulness in every aspect of his life, thereby revealing the presence of faith. The Word directs us to live a sanctified life. (1 Cor 3:17) God instructs us to be holy. (1 Pet 1:15-16) The works of unrighteousness, including "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16) must not be a part of the believer's life.

• We believe that faith and works of righteousness are both necessary for salvation. The Bible says "faith without works is dead." (Jam 2:26) We believe faith alone is a false doctrine which is infiltrating the Apostolic Christian Church.

4.a. Complete restoration for all Sin

Associated closely and a tentacle of eternal security is full and complete reinstatement of a believer who has willfully committed a death sin (John 5:16-17). If the person is restored fully into church fellowship regardless of the depth of sin, this act signifies that the soul has the same standing as a person who has by the grace of God been able to keep himself free from sin. We are aware of unfortunate souls who had been living in deep sin during and after their repentance and baptism, who were restored to complete or full fellowship in the Apostolic Christian brotherhood. (Heb 6:4-8)

4.b. Retaining Church Discipline

A death sin is an abomination in the sight of God and the church has a duty to impart church discipline or excommunication to keep the body of Christ purified. We believe that church discipline is a form of love (1 Cor 5:3-5) and a help to overcome willful sin (1 Tim 5:20).

We cannot accept the complete restoration for all sin (Heb 10:26).

5.a. Surety of Heaven

Passing judgment on someone's life, by placing him in heaven is another aspect of eternal security because there is a disregard of whether the soul has been faithful in God's eyes. Ministers at funeral services who assuredly place someone in heaven (or hell) take upon themselves a degree of eternal judgment which the Scriptures reserve only for God.

5.b. Hope of Heaven

We believe the true and faithful have a hope (Phil 1:20, Gal 5:3, Col 1:5, 1 Thes 5:8, Tit 1:2, Tit 3:7, Heb 6:11) of heaven. We cannot pass judgment on the eternal destiny of a soul by

definitely placing them in heaven at the time of death, or in similar manner, condemning someone to hell when they leave this world. God only knows their destiny.

6.a. Continuous Conversion until Death

A tentacle of eternal security is the belief that the conversion process is never-ending and extends throughout life. In this view, a person makes a decision to serve God and becomes instantly converted and then works at becoming Christ-like for however long it takes. The expression, only believe and accept Christ and you will be saved, is often heard along with this evangelical doctrine.

6.b. Complete Work of Conversion before Baptism

The reverse of the above false doctrine directs a person to do the works of repentance first, turn his life around (Acts 26:18), and then come to a point of conversion (Acts 3:19). The conversion of the Apostle Paul is a Biblical example. (Acts 9:1-22)

Just as a natural birth does not take place instantly, so it is spiritually. Pain and struggle occurs before a born-again believer comes forth. Thus, conversion is a complete work as in like manner Christ's death on the cross had a completion when he said, "It is finished."

Allowing baptisms of converts who are not dead to the world is an injustice to them and a deceitful act, giving them the false hope that they are ready to be born into a life of faith before the old man has died off if the heart has not been cleansed of worldliness and the person is still walking with the world, he lacks full understanding of the converted life. The desire to overcome is weak and is likely to lead to unfaithfulness to God during the trials of life. It is unfair to the convert to let him believe he is converted when he may not be.

"Furthermore, a partially-converted person will not be contented with a simple, peaceful walk with the Lord and in time, will desire something more to satisfy his soul. This will result in wanting to bring worldliness back into his life and eventually into the church, causing offense to the brethren and friends alike." (*Winds of Doctrine, The Conversion experience, pages 20-21*)

Because of the above discussion, we cannot be a part of baptizing souls who are still living in the world and are not dead to the ways of the world, only partially converted or not converted at all.

7.a. Hierarchy.

God has given certain brothers the responsibility of being shepherds of His flock, a duty that cannot be accomplished without grace from above. Christian history reveals how church holiness deteriorates if the leadership becomes a hierarchy which takes the position of priest between God and man. Differing from the Old Law, the New Testament teaches that there is no need for a priest, but that each believer has an open way to approach God through Jesus Christ (11 Cor 3:3). We are concerned that some of

the leadership in the Apostolic Christian Church does not become imperious, giving less and less recognition to the lay brethren's ability to discern the spirits.

The Ecumenical principle of insisting on acceptance of those who do not share the same belief is being promoted by some of the leaders of the Apostolic Christian Church (eg. in conference topics, *Light from the Word*, in memorandums, and at the Elder forums of the Elder Planning Committee).

7.b. Brotherhood of all believers

"We believe in the Word of God as the final authority and as absolute truth" (*Winds of Doctrine*, page 12). We believe the Holy Spirit can move the heart of each individual believer and can speak to all who are of a humble mind. God is not a respecter of persons and reveals Himself to the brother and sister of low degree as well as to those who have high positions in the church. While we recognize and respect the duties and responsibilities of various brothers within the church, we believe that God can speak to all truly converted souls (1 Cor 3:3) and elders have equal authority and duties. One of the historical strengths and protections of the Apostolic Christian church is "there is no hierarchy within the elder body. Each is of equal authority and responsibility..." (Statement of Faith).

Church leaders should recognize and respect the leading of the Holy Spirit among the brotherhood even as the spirit of proving is prayed for during testimonies. As in all aspects of a believer's walk, the Holy Spirit can provide a heaviness and reluctance to move ahead, or it can provide a peace that all is in order. Refusal to hear the concerns of the lay brethren as they listen to the Holy Spirit's promptings is a grave matter. (1 Cor. 6:4. II Cor. 3:3) We believe the brotherhood should "... be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10).

8.a. Justification of Doctrinal Fornication

Allowing the introduction of different beliefs and processes (eg. the cultural change effort) into our faith and bringing evangelical doctrines into the church is destructive to the truth. This has been manifested in the last decade by removing brethren from the ministry who are sound in doctrine and faith. In like manner, lay brethren are feeling pressure from Elders to conform and/or accept ecumenical philosophies and practices that embrace false doctrines. Additionally, acceptance of the use of commentaries, outside reading materials, and interfaith (intermingling with other faiths) Bible studies is a departure or rejection of the doctrine of separation.

8.b. Retaining Apostolic Christian Doctrines

Many of our forefathers endured much affliction and persecution to cast off these false doctrines and find the true and simple path to the heart of God. (Gal 1:8-9)

We cannot accept another gospel (Gal 1:6). We cannot follow another spirit (II Cor 11:3,4) We made a covenant in the waters of baptism to follow the Lord and yield ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit until death.

We reference an exhortation made at a General Conference more than 25 years ago... 'Now what about trends in organized Christianity? We mentioned that our forefathers believed deeply and practiced a distinct separation from other spiritual groups, and they had their own distinct identity, their own traditions, their unique lifestyle and appearance, and many things that drew them together...And surely the doctrine of separation was emphasized to them (the children of Israel), wasn't it? Don't mingle with those people around you, don't get involved in idolatry, mixed marriages, and all these sorts of things. And yes, we know we're in a different age today, but Paul said, "come out from among them and be ye separate" and we believe there again that principle can apply when it comes to spiritual intermingling."

"What happens when ministers of all different faiths start coming together and comparing notes, or people of different religions start wanting to do things together? You have to remove the things that are different because they cause trouble, and so you see a lot of good in each one, but they decide let's ignore our differences, we'll set those aside. And many, many times, unfortunately, that happens to be a solid doctrinal item that has to go by the wayside."

9.a. Intellectual Study of the Scriptures/Higher Criticism

An intellectual approach to studying the Scriptures with the use of man's reason and logic is characteristic of the New Evangelical Movement. This scholarly and intellectual approach is also known as "higher criticism." Elder committees which have engaged in such activity and immersed themselves in the study of certain words or phrases in the scriptures are a direct pattern of the New Evangelicals. (for example: The Sovereignty of God, etc.) Intellectual studies easily become a wresting of the scriptures (Ps 56:5) or turn into a debate "...in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also other scriptures, unto their own destruction." (II Pet 3:16)

9.b. Simple and Humble Faith in the Bible.

We believe in a simple and humble faith in the Bible.

"Reason, logic, and intellect became the standards by which truth was determined, rather than by a simple and humble faith in the Bible as the Word of God. A method for studying the Bible known as higher criticism" had a devastating effect on the doctrinal basis of many churches. This method attempts to determine by human reasoning what the authors of the Scripture intended to convey by their words, as compared to a literal acceptance of the scriptural writings as truth. This opened the door to wide-spread differences and errors in the interpretation of the Scriptures."

(Winds of Doctrine, page 3)

"Satan is making inroads into our faith and causing confusion in our brotherhood by trying to convince us that many of the ancient landmarks of our faith are no longer important. He wants us to believe that we can walk with God and hold hands with the world." *'Denying the Obvious' — Light from the Word*

"The Apostolic Christian Church is built on the foundation of the teachings of Christ and the Apostles. We seek the inspiration of the Spirit for our preaching and teaching, and not the enticing words of man's wisdom (1 Cor 2:4). As part of the body of Christ we strive for the preservation of true faith. We do not take part in modern trends such as ecumenism with its de-emphasis on distinctiveness in doctrine and practice, which ultimately leads to a watering down to the lowest common denominator of standards of belief." *'Attributes of Our Church' — Light from the Word*

10.a. Outreach

A desire to pray for the unsaved and be instrumental to show them the way to salvation is commended in the Scriptures (James 5:20). However, there is a growing push to first develop a relationship with those we want to draw to the Lord, and then tell them about Jesus, whether they are seeking Him or not. This is often done though being involved with worldly activities which the people of this world enjoy, such as playing ball, etc. Although the friendly intent may be pure, the methods of "bringing them in" is not scriptural. (1 Tim 4:12) Participation in worldly activities seems to be justified and is sometimes even encouraged by some of the leadership of the Apostolic Christian Church (eg. young Bros. who play ball with inter-city boys and then after the game witness to them about Christ). Those active in these endeavors reach out and evangelize, but often it is a convincing of souls to "accept Christ" rather than a repentance and conversion with an overcoming life to follow. Another example of inappropriate outreach is when brethren, including ministering brothers, conduct training sessions on how to witness and instruct others on what techniques to use to "save souls." Thus salvation becomes the work of man.

10.b. Salvation as the work of the Spirit

The Apostles, early church fathers, and our forefathers followed the prompting of the Spirit in sharing the gospel and plan of salvation, which is the belief that repentance, conversion, and forsaking of sin are necessary to find peace with God. We believe in bringing the seeking soul to the inn (church) and caring for them until they are baptized into the body of Christ. We are willing and happy to share our God-given beliefs to the seeking soul because salvation is the work of the Spirit. "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate; saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing." II Cor. 6:17

For many decades, the Apostolic Christian Church has been lead of the Spirit in drawing souls to the Lord by responding to inquiries from searching souls...perhaps sharing personal convictions, bringing them to church, and our personal life's example of faithfulness.

"A true disciple of Christ does not have "fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph 5:11), but rather he reproves them. In a culture indulging in pleasure,

ease, and materialism, he sees himself as serving a higher and more soul-satisfying purpose in life. He thus focuses on "redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:16). He seeks to "keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jam 1:27) so that his heart may be an honorable dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. He is keenly aware of the importance of portraying a consistent example, for the disciple's life reflects upon his master. A true disciple is willing to bear the cross of Christ, whatever the cost may be. A humble, obedient lifestyle will often draw questions from others about one's faith." : *True Disciple of Christ' – Light from the Word*

11.a. Unity Effort

Great efforts are being put forth via the Elder forums and the cultural change process to bring about spiritual unity within the brotherhood through various organizational methods. The unity effort emphasizes relationship building, acceptance of differences, communication, listening skills, and corporate business techniques. Those promoting this unity effort have from time to time accused faithful brethren (both individually and collectively) as being rigid, implacable, self-righteous, heretical, etc. The various studies, Elder surveys, and programs enacted over the last several years are examples of man's rationale (Evangelicism). We can not accept such practices but rather embrace the example of the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (1 Cor 2:4-5)

"There are many other examples that could be cited in which the children of the Israel allowed themselves to become allied with ungodly people and it cost them dearly. David recognized this danger and wrote "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful" (Ps 1:1). The Psalmist cautioned us that this situation gets progressively more serious. First we walk with them, then we stand with them, and finally we sit with them." : *Weights 1' -Light from the Word*

11.b. "Spiritual unity is an end result of spiritual oneness"

Spiritual oneness and like mindedness must be present before there can be spiritual unity.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." 1 Cor 1:10 "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Phil 1:27

The issues that cause divisions in the brotherhood have not changed, for example, different doctrines, failure to use the holy kiss, TV, attending movies, participating in

sporting activities, inappropriate dress, sisters cutting their hair, prepared and inappropriate ministering, worldly funerals and weddings, the use of you and your in prayer rather than thee and thou, etc. Spiritual diversity is responsible for the lack of unity.

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God." (Rom 8:14)
"...fear thou the Lord and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change,"
Pro 24:21

With deep humility and in earnestness of the Spirit, we are compelled to express our God-given convictions to stand on the teachings in the Scriptures rather than on man's rationale. (Acts 5:24-29) Although we highly respect the office and duties of Elders and ministers in the church, we cannot follow the false doctrines and teachings that are rising unchecked among us and driving a deep wedge in the brotherhood. (Mark 13:33-37) We can only conclude with the words of Stephen as he was martyred for his faith, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." (Acts 7:60)

Humbly and lovingly,
In the name of Christ,

A Group of Brethren

Note: This document is not signed by any individual as it is a work of numerous sincere brethren in faith. Our desire is to draw clear lines with the doctrines addressed herein rather than to draw attention to certain church members. The signatures are omitted, not because of lack of courage or forthrightness. Should it come to suffering reproach and abuse for our faith and convictions which we believe have been revealed to us by God, we are willing to endure, "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Mat 24:13 We promised to be true and faithful in the waters of baptism, and we feel compelled to keep the covenant we made, only with God's grace, in order to remain on the way to Heaven. May God grant us each the Spirit of discernment and strength to overcome in these last days.