

Church of God, The Eternal

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Warmest Greetings To All Our Brothers And Sisters In Christ:

We are living in the times of the mysterious, the unexplained, the unusual. No one can quite put his finger on the pulse of events, circumstances, or conditions that are occurring all over the earth. It is not that people are not talking about these troubling times; they just do not know what to make of them. The propaganda machinery is well oiled. Much is written and talked about concerning the two-sided coin of modern existence. But after all is said and done the mystery remains as mysterious and troubling as ever to the average man of the street. This state of affairs is most telling in the lives of people all around the world. Suicides, mental aberrations, emotional outbursts, and "I could care less" attitudes prevail everywhere. And the tragedy of it all is this: Conditions are only going to deteriorate at a very accelerating pace. This world is looking at a prelude of the time of terrible difficulties. One of these days the full reality of that fact will strike home personally -- to all living human beings. Desperation and hopelessness will then reign.

The only people who will possess any edge in this terrible struggle will be those called of God and who have prepared themselves to weather this raging sea. This fact alone gives us great reason to begin to accept the realities of trials and difficulties now. If we can count these circumstances a joy for the hope that lies ahead of us, how much easier it will be to accept the more difficult times. Then, if God mercifully elects to protect us from the final days of these sobering events, we shall have been accounted worthy of even a greater blessing. The point is this: NOW is the time to make mental preparation for the inevitability of these catastrophic events.

Interestingly, the very requirement of mental preparation negates the concept of judging and criticizing others. To really prepare the self for these days, we must evidence maximum love, compassion, and understanding toward mankind. A critical, judging attitude puts one in the very basic mental framework for the development of the above-mentioned state of hopelessness and desperation.

The question of why we should not employ the standard of truth which we understand to evaluate other people has not been answered. After carefully reviewing the concepts which we have previously

presented regarding the subject of judging others, it has become very clear that the reasons why such an orientation is categorically wrong have not been presented. This lack of explanation, hopefully, will be eliminated with the presentation of this Monthly Letter.

WHY IS JUDGING OTHERS SO TRAGICALLY WRONG?

To understand any part of the great Plan of God requires a basic understanding of the overall Plan. From the beginning God had some purpose in mind -- long before He created the physical universe and then placed man upon the earth to dress and keep it.

What did God have in mind?

Principally, it involves the God-family. This is a family totally beyond the realm of the human-family. It is a purpose which relates to the chasm existing between the God-family and the human-family. Understanding the basic question involved in judging others requires an understanding of that divine family. From this premise, we can begin to comprehend the foreordained plan.

What is axiomatic to the family of God? What self-evident fact will serve as a point of reference in our quest to understand His purpose for us -- man? It is seen in the subtitle below.

God Is Perfect

The God-family alone dwells in absolute perfection. All that they do is without defect. Of God Moses wrote, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut. 32:4). Years later righteous Samuel wrote, "As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him. For who is God, save the Lord? and who is a rock, save our God?" (II Samuel 22:31-32.)

Holy men of old were greatly amazed by this concept. They were awed by the perfection of God. Many years after the time of Samuel, King David repeated the poetic statement of Samuel (Ps. 18:30). In many other ways David consistently extolled the perfection of God. When the minds of men are motivated by the Spirit of God, they are both physically and emotionally inspired by the sum of perfection in which God exists. That sum is awesome. It is beyond carnal comprehension.

Yes, God is perfect. But, what is this perfection?

What Is The Perfection Of God?

Recorded in the pages of the Bible are many characteristics of God which reveal much about His perfection. Genuine perfection is not only a state of being, but also a manner of operation, mental and emotional control, capacity of knowledge, and purpose.

Let us take a brief look at some of the texts dealing with the perfection of God. From these we can have a greater and better appreciation of the concept of perfection.

God is consistent (Heb. 13:8). No winds of change prevail. He is always the same. He is trustworthy. There are no mood swings so common to men.

He is straightforward and absolute (Jas. 1:17). There exists no element of doubt or uncertainty. As the prophets of old so consistently stated, "He is the Rock." Rocks do not move. They do not change. When beneficently positioned, they are landmarks by which men identify and orient themselves. God is our Rock.

He is not subject to whimsical or evil influences (Jas. 1:13). God has perfect control over His mind and emotions. Evil, wrong, and base things do not exert any influence upon Him. The character of His will does not allow for the manifestation of these pulls.

Perversion, distortion, ambiguity, double-talk, hypocrisy, deceit, and outright falsehood are not a part of His mental direction (Titus 1:2, Num. 23:19). He is a God of perfect character. No such perversion or corruption in any way exists in His way of thinking or acting.

He is the very personification of Light (I John 1:5). Darkness does not prevail in His orientation. Subterfuge and hidden intent do not exist. Light is a manifestation of His total character. It is revealing and open -- not secretive or underscored with innuendo. There is not even a hint of wrong.

He is not destructive or critical (compare Rom. 5:8 and Matt. 9:13). While we were deeply mired in sin, God manifested great love for humanity by sending His own Son to die for us. He provided a way out of our own wretchedness by making an awesome sacrifice of His own. This very move proceeds from the depth of love in His character.

God is the optimum expression of compassion and love (Luke 6:27-45). Compassion and love are elements of outgoing concern. They are

the manifestations of outgoing concern for those mired in deep difficulty.

There are two objectives of love. First, it is a manifestation of respect for one who lives an exemplary life -- one who has complete control of his whole being. Equally, however, it is a sympathetic and understanding relationship with those who are experiencing difficulty. God is a comprehensive expression of both elements.

What is the character of God? It is immutability, consistency. It is an implicit and positive orientation. It is not swayed by the allurements of evil. A nature in which perversion, hypocrisy, deceit, and distortion does not exist. It is a nature of self-control -- a nature in which the mind (not the emotions) rules -- tempered by strong, yet controlled, feelings of compassion and affection.

The above gives us a brief view of the character of God. This overview is essential to understand the material presented in the following pages.

We have briefly reviewed the character of God. Now it is time for us to turn to man whom God created. What does God have in mind for him?

What Has God Purposed For Us?

In a single sentence Jesus Christ made God's purpose for man clear. As God is perfect, so man is to become perfect (Matt. 5:48). The Apostle Peter emphasized this concept. He said we must become possessors of the divine nature (II Pet. 1:4).

Although there are fundamental weaknesses inherent in flesh, the real problem of man lies in the nature of his mind. Without mind, man is merely a vegetable. While existing as a vegetable he is not conscious of either good or evil. He simply is not held accountable for his actions.

Man with mind capacity and power is accountable. For this reason, the called of God must effect a mind replacement. The called must subdue the old, carnal mind. At the same time they must replace the old mind by the infusion of the new mind -- the mind of Jesus Christ (Ph'p. 2:5). Since the body of Jesus Christ is made up of many individuals called to receive this mind-change, perfection of the Body (the Church) depends on everyone in the Body receiving the same mind (II Cor. 13:11). Compare I Corinthians 1:10.

To the thinking mind, it becomes obvious that spiritual growth -- that is, mind-change -- requires change. Jesus Christ addressed this matter in His Passover prayer to the Father. He requested that we ". . . may be made perfect in one . . ." (John 17:23). That change is the work of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Yet, we do have our part. God does the actual changing (Ps. 18:32); we, in turn, must allow or permit this operation to transpire in our lives (Ph'p. 2:5 -- "Let this mind be in you . . .").

Genuine perfection involves the heart and mind -- not a mere letter response (Matt. 19:16-22). Perfection proceeds from the will. It stems from innate desire and purpose. It cannot come from fear and coercion.

God wants us to be servants of character. He wants us to face our called liability, personally, and to effect required changes of mind and heart individually. With such a change in mind and heart, the called servant of God will make his own determination to act. With this replacement of heart and mind, the defect of the old nature will have been corrected (Deut. 5:29).

Character is manifested in the individual will. Can legislated obedience ever produce character?

Why Is Legislated Obedience Abominably Wrong?

Christ is the elder brother of all who are called to be sons and daughters of God. He is our perfect example. It is within this perfect example that we will find God's purpose for the called.

Among the many reasons for the first appearance of Jesus Christ, what are two very significant purposes? The Apostle John said, ". . . grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). 1. "Grace," that is, unmerited pardon for sin was to be made available to man. 2. "Truth," that is, a spiritual dimension to God's Law was to be made available to those called. These are two basic requirements mandatory for the accomplishment of perfection. They are two responsibilities borne and fulfilled in the life of Christ. He is our example. Regarding the above two points, what lessons can we learn from the life of Christ?

As our example, it was necessary for Christ to suffer in order to be made perfect (Heb. 2:10). Obedience (the objective of Truth) was learned by those things that He experienced -- those things for which

He suffered (Heb. 5:8). Being made perfect through those experiences, Christ became the Author of our salvation (Heb. 5:9).

Why was it necessary for Christ to pave the way to salvation for us? Because human obedience is simply not possible. There is no such heart or mind in man (Deut. 5:29). Joshua knew and understood this fact (Josh. 24:15-20).

The promise of a change of heart and mind for man was given to Moses just before his death (Deut. 30:6). In this promise, God assures man that He will circumcise the heart so that understanding and obedience will be made possible. This is the change which Jesus Christ brought to light.

God made man with a nature that could not of itself obey the commands imposed upon him. At the appropriate time, God promised to institute the possibility of a complete heart- and mind-change. As seen earlier, this mind-change occurs gradually; it is a matter of spiritual growth.

Why did God will to develop man in a spiritual manner by this course of experience and suffering? Christ who is our example first experienced the operation of this spiritual plan of salvation. Comparing the purposes of Christ's human existence and the natural condition of man, we can easily understand the awesome plan and purpose of God. Also by this comparison, we can readily understand why any and all legislated obedience is now an anathema to God.

As our example, Christ took upon Himself the nature of man (Ph'p. 2). What is the purpose for the weakness of flesh?

Jeremiah said that the heart of man is deceitful above all things. It is desperately evil and cannot be understood by man of himself (Jer. 17:9). It is God who must evaluate the heart of man (vs. 10). For what purpose would God observe and evaluate the behavior of any man? So that He can allow or directly bring to pass events and circumstances by which the called man will learn the object lessons intended (Jer. 17:10). And it is before Christ Himself that all will stand to give account for their actions (Rom. 14:10). Man is not ultimately accountable to anyone else (Rom. 14:12). As God calls one, sustains him and directs him, it is His responsibility to work with and finish the product with which He has begun to work (Rom. 14:4). We are assured that God will have a desire for the workmanship of His own hands.

We are born as infants physically; likewise, God commences us as spiritual babes (I Pet. 2:1-3). Mere babes are far less accountable

than those who are full grown. In like manner, spiritual age does determine the level of accountability borne by every individual chosen to understand the Truth. If accountability increases with age, it is very obvious that spiritual growth is imperative (II Pet. 3:17-18). Such growth is the acquisition of additional knowledge and experience. It does not imply any fundamental change of philosophy.

As a chosen child of God changes from a physical orientation to that of a spiritual dimension, it becomes equally obvious that the maturing spiritual child is a mixture of both physical and spiritual. Consistent evaluation by both God and the servant himself is essential for proper development.

God must examine and prove us (Ps. 26:2; 139:23). We are His workmanship. He is developing within us the character which He alone possesses.

All the ways and thoughts of a carnal man are right in his own eyes. From such a natural premise, man cannot even judge himself. He must be spiritually educated. Such education is obtained through the channels of spiritual growth (maturity) and experience (Isa. 7:15; 65:11-16). And experience requires choice -- choice of direction. Man can pursue the way of flesh; or, he can choose the way of the Spirit if called to comprehend that Way of Life. If compelled to pursue the Way of Life, a man may have obeyed a specific command, but no character was manifested. Character is evidenced only when a man compels himself to act contrary to that which his nature dictates.

God reveals the Truth to those called. They are now equipped to make personal judgments in their lives (Rom. 12:1-3). Then God, as our spiritual Creator, can lead us through a host of trials and experiences for a purpose. Ancient Israel was our example (Deut. 8:2).

Viewing the revealed Truth of God from the human premise of carnality, the chosen can make a choice. They can refuse to cater to the natural tendencies and will to obey the Spirit. Such change comes from the heart, not the result of legislation or coercion. Acceptable change comes from the will -- personal will to be faithful and obedient.

Choice is fundamental to character development (Deut. 30:15-19). Character cannot be created by fiat or developed through legislation. Man of himself is not able to produce it (Deut. 5:29; 29:4). Character is that spiritual summation which God possesses. God has the power and the "right" to do whatever He pleases. Yet He cannot lie. Not because someone is restraining Him, but because His character will not allow

Him to act contrary to the absolutes of perfection. He is the epitome of perfection and character; He chooses to live by absolutes.

Character Proceeds From Choice

Vacillation, changeableness, doubt, arrogancy, conceit, self-righteousness, and rebellion are all manifestations of carnality. They are indigenously part of the natural heart (Deut. 5:29). Recognizing these defects of the flesh, the called servant desires a change of the heart. Why? Because God looks on the heart, not at the external characteristics (I Sam. 15:7). But how can man change that with which he was born -- an evil, carnal heart and mind?

Real character development begins by a miracle from God coupled with willingness on the part of the called. Both the Creator and the created must play a part; the called are fellow laborers with God.

The natural man cannot receive the things of God (I Cor. 2:14). To build perfect character two things must happen. One, our hearts must be inclined toward God in faithful obedience (I Kings 8:57-61). Two, God must reveal the Truth to us (I Cor. 2:9-10).

Can our hearts be acceptably inclined toward God and at the same time become the recipients of revealed Truth? If called, those responses are the result of a gift -- the gift of the mind of Jesus Christ (Ph'p. 2:5). With the mind of Jesus Christ we stand in awe of the Word of God (Isa. 66:2-5). We are inspired and motivated to pursue the way of peace (Rom. 14:19), not the way of wrath, war, and rebellion (Rom. 3:9-18) -- a way characteristic of carnal man. With that spirit we can unitedly manifest a singleness of mind (II Cor. 13:11). Further, we will be energetically addicted to the way of the Truth (Luke 17:10).

Initially, we are begotten by the will of God (Jas. 1:18). We had little to do with that call (Rom. 11:29). Once that call is given, the die is cast. We can accept or reject it, but accountability is inevitable regardless.

From the time of our call and begetting to a new life, the development of character begins. What is transpiring down deep in the hearts of those called is giving new direction. At the same time this attitude and direction are being read by God (Prov. 23:7; 11:5; 4:20-27, Ps. 101:2-6). What He is reading will become the basis for tests and experiences yet to be developed whereby individuals will be tried. With these trials further character development will be made possible.

Knowing the operation of God, let us be careful not to interpret surface manifestations in others, instead of their hearts -- as God sees and understands (II Cor. 5:12). Attempting to "play God" is extremely tenuous and must be avoided at all cost. Men simply do not possess the spiritual capability to make such judgments (Mark 7:14-23, Prov. 28:26). Rather, they should all remember that God is yet working with all His called servants, producing the necessary character for the inheritance of everlasting life. Let us individually evaluate the things which are happening in our own lives (Prov. 1:24-33).

Real character allows no room for hypocrisy; real, unaffected character proceeds from the heart -- the heart of each individual -- not from fear of any physical reprisal. It comes from singleness of purpose (Eph. 6:5-6, Col. 3:22). It is one's personal choice of direction and action (Heb. 11:25). It is one's personal choice to orient his life spiritually, not physically.

No character development is remotely possible until one recognizes his natural state (I John 1:6, 8). From that acknowledgement, required changes can commence (Deut. 10:16, compare Rom. 2:29). These, then, become the pure in heart (Matt. 5:8).

With this perspective, growth is possible. For the first time one can begin to understand the events which are occurring in life. Based upon the experience derived from various trials, including a proper evaluation of prevailing conditions and effecting subsequent modifications in one's life, changes can transpire. Sometimes, the changes are not realized immediately. Being a character builder, God is perfectly capable of bringing ever greater and more intense trials until the servant is made willing to change. But such changes must proceed from the purpose and intervention of God. They cannot be legislated by man or human organizations. Under such circumstances, changes can be made, but for wrong reasons. When such changes are made, the person effecting those changes is not prepared to stand fast and firm in the day of doubt, trouble, confusion, or mental pressure. How thoroughly this principle has been underscored by the recent breaking and scattering of God's people. How many stood firm in their original convictions? Does this not illustrate the defect in any coerced obedience? Only personal obedience, from the conviction of heart, will truly sustain the called of God. To compel obedience out of a sense of fear -- fear of the physical domain -- is to render a giant disservice to any human being. Such a coerced individual is not prepared for the rigors of "faith-trials." A coercive approach is tantamount to parents inordinately shielding children from the difficulties of life. They are simply unequipped to handle the responsibilities of adulthood.

God is the Author of the very means by which character is produced (Ps. 119:65-71, 33-40, I Pet. 1:6-7; 5:10). Carefully note the results of the terrible trials and experiences of Israel in this refining process (Deut. 4:29). When men do not attempt to interrupt the purpose of God, those who experience the consequences of their wrong ways will learn valuable lessons which will aid them in giving direction to their lives. Based on our own experiences, knowledge of the Truth, individual level of faith, and conviction developed through trials, we must strive diligently for personal perfection and character quality (Heb. 6:1).

Since men are not the developers of character and perfection, what attitude should they manifest toward those who are undergoing trials and difficulties? Should they be quick to censure and correct others? Is it imperative that we shun those who do not evidence the same level of faith as we deem ourselves to possess? God, through His servant James, made this point quite clear. We need only to present our own selves before the mirror of God's Law. From that revealing experience, man should be very slow to speak evil about anyone else (Jas. 1:19-27).

God and Christ are the Authors and Finishers of our faith. Before them we will stand or fall. Teaching the fundamentals of the Way by which life can be realized is the function of the ministry. Yet, in no place in all the Bible did Christ, who is our example of a true Minister, ever judge personally. He clearly stated that such judgment was reserved for a future date.

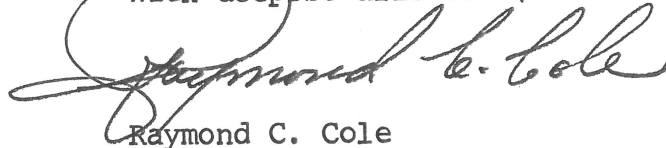
Each of us must obey the Truth which God reveals. That obedience must stem from choice, not from physical fear. Legislated obedience may produce many servants who respond as long as things go well. But real character can never come from such a pursuit. Real character can come only from personal choice -- the kind of choice which will sustain any individual regardless of the trials of the faith involved. This is the only character worthy of inheriting everlasting life -- to inherit the very domain of the perfection of God.

In a future issue of the Monthly Letter we will address the questions of: 1. What must not be tolerated, and 2. What Christians are required to tolerate. For the purpose of this Letter it is imperative that we realize that character cannot be developed through any form of legislation. It comes from choice alone. God, Himself, created the time for each of us in the development of that character. Men must not interfere with the operation of God. Those who do so could be held accountable for these erroneous actions.

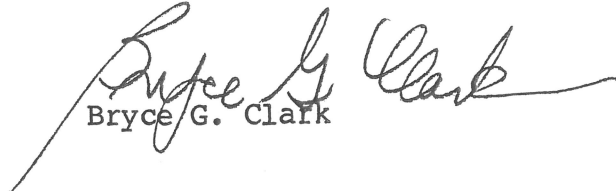
Each of us has been given a responsibility. Let us make the necessary changes required in our lives. We will then be prepared for the inheritance of the reward which God has made available.

Again, all our love and respect. We sincerely count it a pleasure to serve and help you in these times of trial and experience. Our prayers are always with you.

With deepest affection,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Raymond C. Cole

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bryce G. Clark". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Bryce G. Clark