

Church of God, The Eternal

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July 1990

Dear Brethren:

Hectic and fast-paced Summer is upon us. Activity is the spice of life. But without the help of God, how man could ever organize his time? We have come to rely upon it implicitly.

What Is a Questioning Spirit?

Questions are virtually a way of life for the serious minded, curious, and anyone analytically oriented. Can anything be wrong with asking any question which would aid enlightenment, clarify understanding, or enhance study? Of course not! Yet, there is something on which God frowns and is always connected to machinations and deceptions of Satan, the devil.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that a "questioning spirit" does prevail in these times in which we live. For, beyond any shadow of doubt, these days are what the Bible calls the "last days." Reading carefully the comments of those inspired to write of these days, there is an decided emphasis upon a generalized attitude of mind and heart which is totally unacceptable to God. If unacceptable to God, most assuredly we, as mere human beings, do not want to be caught involved in any exercise anathema to God.

To configure our thinking so that we may correctly grasp the conditions which prevail in our days and thereby come to an accurate mental orientation, it is imperative that we take note of, and then carefully analyze, the textual material which prophesies of a "questioning spirit" in our time. From this foundation we then may proceed to comprehend correctly what God approves and what is totally unacceptable to Him.

"Questioning Spirit" Exists in Last Days

Though historically based, many of the Apostle Paul's writings, whether to the churches themselves or to some of his assistants, are directly and specifically written to this final generation in which we live. Frequently the Holy Spirit inspired him to write of the conditions which would prevail in the "last days." When inspiring Paul, the Holy Spirit did not make a mistake. Paul was specifically and directly writing of our time. Therefore, when writing to the young evangelist Timothy, in II Timothy 3, the Apostle Paul was writing a segment of the Bible which would directly relate to us today—even though it had a historical basis, too.

In verse 1, Paul speaks of perilous times which would exist in these last days. Men would lose all form of decency, honesty, consideration, compassion, and respect. They would become totally selfishly oriented. What men? As we progress, the context of the material covered will make the answer to that question abundantly clear. They are religious in their inclination, verse 2. In the same verse we are informed that the faithful have some form of relationship with them. How can one avoid that with which he has no contact? Further, their concepts are subject to consistent change, verse 7. Interestingly, however, they never come to a fundamental knowledge of the Truth. Why? The undeniable answer is found in verse 8. Here the Apostle Paul distinctly relates a historical example to circumstances applicable today. The example was that of Jannes and Jambres who withstood Moses. Remember, the children of Israel were the called of God at that time. In like manner, among those called of God in these last days are those who consistently resist the Truth, due to perverted and corrupt minds, and thereby become reprobate concerning the faith. That is, they have exalted their own mental capability and have consequently made their own determinations regarding the validity of Truth. They have manifested no faith in that which God had given to them at the time of their call, conversion, and baptism. Having been classified as called and a part of the faithful required to hear the Truth, accept it in faith, and act out the symbolism of self-death, baptism. The problem here relates not to their original acts of faith, but rather that which happened after they lost faith.

In verse 13 we are informed of the magnitude of the problem which would prevail in the last days. ". . . Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." How, then, in such a society, are the faithful to remain confident and assured? Paul, through the power of the Holy Spirit, emphasizes: ". . . continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (v. 14). What did we hear and learn in the last days?

II Timothy reveals a frightful state of unbelief in these last days! This condition exists not outside of the body; on the contrary, it exists within. How and why could such a condition develop? The latter part of chapter 2 reveals the answer. The surfacing of a rash of foolish and unlearned questions. The faithful are urged to reject all such questioning. The essence of this requirement will be addressed at the appropriate time.

For the present we need to understand the concept of questions in a very specific context. Is all questioning incorrect and wrong in the sight of God? If not, what questions are acceptable?

Unacceptable Questions

All questions are not inherently wrong. Intent and purpose are, as in so many other issues of life, vitally and fundamentally important.

First, we need to understand forms of questions which are inherently wrong—questions, as we shall see later, which do not satisfy the one basic requirement for validity.

1. Questions calculated to ensnare and/or trick the other party

- A. Matt. 16:1 (1–4). The word "desired" in verse 1 is from a Greek word which means "to ask."

- B. Matt. 22:23, 34, 35 (23–40). In every case the attempt was to corner Christ.
 - C. Mark 10:2 (2–12). Again there is no legitimacy to the question. The interrogators were merely trying to ensnare Christ.
 - D. Luke 20:21–26. How crafty some human beings think they are.
 - E. Luke 22:64 (63–65). We often wonder just how God views our supposed approach to Him and His Son Jesus Christ!
2. Questions designed to accuse.
 - A. Matt. 12:10 (10–13). Hardheartedness, the by-product of self-righteousness.
 3. Questions about issues, events, times God has chosen not to reveal
 - A. Mark 8:11 (10–13). Sometimes people are insistent even though motives are entirely wrong.
 - B. Luke 17:20 (20–27). We may not be intending to respond, but we demand recognition and to be heard.
 4. Questions which reflect nothing more than human arrogance
 - A. Mark 12:28, 34 (28–34). The motive of the questioner here seems to be nothing more than an attempt to display his mental prowess.
 - B. Mark 14:60–65. Self-justifying prejudice seems to be so satisfying to position of power and carnality in general. See also Luke 23:3.
 - C. Luke 22:23–24. Entrapped by questions asked out of ignorance of basic facts, or predicated on manifestations of raw carnality
 - D. Acts 6:9–15. Human nature turns to fabricated accusation and ridicule when confronted with facts of truth and logic.
 5. Questions which seek approbation of the self
 - A. Mark 10:17 (17–22). Truth is fatal to those whose motives are influenced by position or possession.
 6. Questions which are predicated on a human weakness—faithlessness
 - A. Luke 24:15 (13–32). How utterly devastating a lack of faith really is to any human being—though called of God. So many of our questions stem from a distrust of revealed doctrine and the lessons of history experienced. Note carefully verse 25.
 7. Questions which manifest a rejection of confidence in a divine revelation of truth
 - A. I Cor. 1:20 (18–23). The disputer—one who questions—rests confidently in his own mental powers to ascertain and determine truth. Characteristic of the uncalled; but devastating to one who once knew and understood the Truth.

The above makes abundantly clear that there are many reasons why men ask unacceptable questions. These questions are antagonistic to the intent and purpose of the Spirit of God. However, let us now understand that such a trait or characteristic is indigenously human—accepted of God as a natural, carnal trait. He knows that we are flesh. He made us thus.

The following English words come from Greek words which mean, generally, "to reason, ask questions, or make pronouncements." At this juncture we want to observe only those which carry a negative concept—the basis of the concepts given above. Many by nature have an evil, questioning bent—man's innate thoughts, Matthew 15:19. See also Mark 7:21. In Luke 24:38, Christ wondered incredulously at the lack of faith and belief of the twelve apostles. He had revealed Himself unto them. He had revealed the Truth to them, but the power of the Holy Spirit had not yet been given—they were unable to maintain belief and trust. Their questions—*thoughts*—came from a lack of faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God. Further, when carnality dominates our orientation, our questions—*imagination*s—are vain and ludicrous (Rom. 1:21). Any such questions will invariably produce *doubt*, strife, argument, and contention (Rom. 14:1). Any such condition is antithetical to faith, confidence, belief. It is a manifestation of the natural condition of man—*thoughts*—questions known by God (I Cor. 3:20).

Before becoming learned in the truths and ways of God, man can only stand in awe of the power, authority, and inflexibility of those ways (Mark 1:27–28). After being called and having experienced the verity of such truths, doubt can only be considered ignominious and disrespectful toward God. Note also Mark 9:10 (2–10).

Next, let us analyze questions which seem to be totally acceptable to God. Contextually we can readily ascertain that all questions are not anathema to God. A thorough analysis will make this concept plain.

Some Questions Are Acceptable

As indicated earlier, questioning is virtually a way of life. It serves the questioner in many ways. In many ways questions are acceptable and do not meet with the disapproval of God Himself. What are some of those acceptable orientations?

1. Our example, Christ, asked questions.
 - A. Luke 2:46 (41–49). In both a learning and teaching process, Christ both asked cogent questions and answered those about which He had infinitely superior knowledge.
 - B. Mark 11:29 (27–33). In using a question response, Christ was employing an age-old concept. Answering a question with a question oftentimes will reveal the real intent of hypocrisy and subtlety emanating from the hearts and minds of the interrogators. The serious wrong here is not on the part of Christ, rather it existed in the minds and hearts of those who were attempting to entrap Him.
 - C. Luke 6:9 (6–11). Another example of Christ using a well thought-out question to silence the ignorance and stupidity of hecklers. Truth and honesty can stand on their own two feet. Perversion and bias cannot stand in the presence of illuminating light.
2. Questions asked for the purpose of clarification or understanding
 - A. Matt. 17:10 (9–13). The disciples were asking to understand what they had previously heard—in relationship to what they had just heard Christ say. (Note: They accepted Christ's answer. They did not in turn doubt or question the response of Christ.)

- B. Mark 10:10 (2–12). New, profound, and conceptually changed information is mystifying. The intelligent and honest will admit a clouded understanding and ask for clarification. Contrast the two questions involved in this incident. The purpose of the original interrogators was to ensnare; whereas, the purpose of the disciples was to improve their understanding. What a difference orientation makes!
- C. Luke 8:9 (4–15). A simple quest for understanding. They wanted to comprehend the intent and purpose of the parable which Christ had given.
- 3. Questions by which to gather information and/or gain perspective
 - A. Matt. 22:41–46. One of the early public opinion polls. Gaining this information was essential for the fulfillment of His ministry.
 - B. Mark 8:27 (27–33). Again, Christ, by a well-placed question, forced the convictions and beliefs of the disciples to come to the surface. Obviously an acceptable usage of questions.
- 4. Questions by which motives are exposed
 - A. Mark 9:33 (33–37). How many times human beings, by attempts to conceal words and actions, admit their culpability. The honest have no reason to hide anything.
 - B. Acts 9:29 (23–31). Questions which force anyone to be honest with facts and information. The intent is to expose; not to injure.
- 5. Questions which clarify understanding—regarding times or specifics
 - A. Matthew 24:3 (1–3). If questions are directed to the right One, even information regarding times and specifics may be given.
(Note also: Mark 13:3–4, Luke 21:7.)
 - B. Acts 1:6 (4–9). For reasons, some questions may be asked, but answers should not be given. It is our obligation to accept that condition as a fact without argument and contempt.
- 6. Questions which are for the purpose of seeking proper direction and acceptable response
 - A. Luke 13:14 (10–17). Of major significance, what is the basis for our question? And, what is the hidden intent and purpose?
 - B. I Peter 3:21 (15–22). Are we capable of giving a good answer for the behavior and actions manifested in our lives?
- 7. Questions which precipitate family accord, agreement, and strength
 - A. I Cor. 14:35 (32–40). Questions can indicate much about the individual or the family. Manifested are inherent duty and harmony. These are manifestations which God can and does read.

Appropriate questions should be asked (Mark 9:32). We must make that point perfectly clear. Yet, it must be equally understood that there is something which is not acceptable behavior of the called and chosen of God.

For purposes of clarification, let us note that the ministerial servants of God did employ the usage of pure questions as well as a questioning intent in effective preaching of the Truth of God to the people. The Greek word *dialegomai*, means "to preach, reason, or dispute by question." It is a powerful form of appeal. The Apostle Paul used it frequently. In Acts 17:2, Paul *reasoned with* them out of the Scriptures. Note this same persuasive pull in Acts 18:4, 19, and Acts 24:25. The word further means "to contend forcibly, dispute." Note the usage in Acts 17:17; 19:8–9; 24:12. Basically, it is simply a form of preaching the Word, Acts 20:7–9. If called and truly chosen of God, the force of *dialegomai* is subjective—it insinuates itself into our alerted consciousness, compelling introspection and self-evaluation (Heb. 12:5, 3–5). Note carefully that it does not question others.

Foundationless and Irrelevant Questions

How can intelligent and meaningful questions be asked when the whole premise and basis of conviction is erroneous? Somewhere in this mistaken motivation must surely be found the orientation of a mind and heart out of which proceeds questions totally unacceptable to God. And true to the devious nature of man, questions predicated on a false premise are more emotionally charged than a legitimate, educational question designed and asked for the purpose of learning and making necessary corrections in life. Man will fiercely defend the self, but all too frequently effect only a feeble sputter defending revealed Truth. Man lightly esteems God. However, he highly esteems the self and all that it stands for with regard to conviction. With regard to self, man is emotionally involved. Let us note a couple of instructive examples given by Christ.

First, note Mark 7:5–13. Here, traditions became the premise of all evaluation and conclusions. Little validity was given to content, either of that which they had always believed or that which they were then hearing. They had traditionally practiced their ritualistic beliefs. These practices seemed acceptable to them. Why should they change? These traditions had become a part of their way of doing things. They had not arrived at conclusions based on either intense and thorough physical study or as a product of divine revelation. They were a part of an acquired life based on family, surroundings—the total empirical self. Though probably not understood, such concepts will be guarded and defended with life itself.

The common reaction: "If it was good enough for my past relatives, it certainly is good enough for me." Until something causes us to stop dead in our tracks and take an honest look at what we really do believe, tradition and acquired responses will prevail. And tragically, all answers to questions which we encounter will be given on the basis of that "false foundation." This is exactly what the Pharisees and scribes were doing. They had historically acquired the name of God. They appropriated it, though the beliefs had little relevance, if any at all. So strong is the emotional tie to any acquired belief, whatever it may be, that real truth will be categorically rejected to make room for continuity of belief and practice, tradition.

The second example here given, John 18:19–23, illustrates how deceptively we impute intent and motive to "what we hear." Once the motive or intent is established in our minds, we guard the concept in a myriad ways. If others who heard disagree with our deductions, they are not to be trusted. After all, did not we hear, too? We do not need the

corroboration of anyone else. Remember, the natural man is not seeking the truth—the absolute facts involved in any matter. On the contrary, where emotions, cherished beliefs, and practices are concerned, man is looking for approbation, not correction. In this example the people who were challenging Jesus were not interested in determining if what they had heard was correct. They already "knew" that.

In exactly the same way, we need to be extra careful about our intent or motive for any question. Are we asking to learn? Or are we attempting to substantiate or justify the self? All men have motives for what they say and do. Many, if not all, perform so spontaneously that real motive or intent does not surface in their consciousness. And in all cases, if a wrong motive or intent exists, they certainly hope that they are sufficiently clever to hide it from others. One of those devious traits which must be mastered in conversion. Akin to the above concepts is a related issue. Some questions do not even warrant pursuit. The contention is biased to begin with. Truth cannot come from such circumstances. Truth is not sought. Minds are already made up. Why, then, even ask a question? To pursue any such matter is futility.

Let us note a couple of examples of the above bias. Both are quite revealing with regard to the natural, emotional, defiant mind. In Mark 15:1–5 we are informed of Christ's interrogation by Pilate. Here he asks a question which had been the center of contention for many months. Those who were inclined to accept the revelation given by Christ—His identity and purpose—had already done so. At this juncture, others were merely seeking "evidence" against Him. They were not intending to weigh the evidence and give Christ a fair trial. Their minds were already made up. Why, then, even answer the questions uttered?

When the judicial responsibility had been transferred from Pilate to Herod, Herod was inclined to ask questions. Christ's response was the same because the conditions were exactly the same. Answers were absolutely useless. As in the case above, none of the responsible individuals was looking for truth.

So it is today. Oftentimes response to certain questions is nothing more than a pointless consumption of time. The questioner's attitude is not one of seeking truth, the right. He has secret ulterior motives. Of course, such an individual is not going to reveal his orientation. He desperately hopes to deceive the hearer.

Even though the orientation of some questioners is not honorable, the righteous respond favorably, kindly, and with confidence until any further response appears to be useless. Peter wrote of the attitude. We are told to be of one mind, compassionate, loving, and kind. Not to render evil for evil, rather a blessing. To keep our tongues and mouths from speaking injuriously and to be the creators of peace. Such are seen and observed by God the Father. Under all circumstances, at least initially, the righteous—right-hearted—must be ready to give an answer to all who would ask a reason for the hope which manifests itself in their lives. When integrity manifests itself, the righteous are ready to answer relevant questions. They are not ashamed of belief or practice (I Pet. 3:8–16). In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ emphasized the need to be honorable in our approach, if we will to be faithful to the Truth. He said: ". . . Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). The Greek word used for "despitefully use" in the above text implies the abusive usage of injurious questions. Even those who are so evilly oriented

should be the recipients of the love, affection of the called and converted. What a task to live up to that expectation. The same expression is used in Luke 6:28.

What Is Meant by a Questioning Spirit?

As may be clearly determined from Acts 15:2, 7, and John 3:25, basic questions requiring study and counsel are not inherently wrong. In Acts 15, verses 2 and 7, we may deduce that a largely administrative question, though there are definitely doctrinal overtones, may need to be discussed and resolved. These questions were within the ministry—questions which had not been clearly and specifically discussed by Jesus Christ prior to His ascension. The resolution of the question must be in keeping with the basics of that which had already been delivered. In a review of the whole situation, it is apparent that Acts 15 is not a change from a basic which had been previously given. It was the resolution of a situation which had not been addressed in the past. A complete change would have been one thing. Growth from confronted issues and responsibilities is quite another. Such questions are perfectly acceptable. Clearly, questions in and of themselves are not a problem. In a somewhat comparable fashion, John the Baptist encountered a divisive issue during the time of his preaching (John 3:25, 25–36). John was led of the Holy Spirit to give a decisive answer which the Jews never did accept, as the record of the Bible clearly reveals.

We have addressed the matter of acceptable and unacceptable questions. Some questions are perfectly legitimate. Others are not. Is there any way by which we can determine just what questions God frowns on? And why?

There are only four texts which use any expression which can be reduced to the concept of a "questioning spirit." With the above background information and that which is contained within the following texts to be given, it will become abundantly clear just what such an attitude implies.

First, Paul addresses the issue to young Timothy. In I Timothy 1:4 Paul instructs Timothy, "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith. . . ." Verse 3 makes it quite clear that Paul was concerned with doctrine. Doctrine which had been delivered by divine revelation. Doctrine which some were rejecting because they wanted to be teachers of their own concepts, verses 6–7.

Second, Paul wrote of continuing problems in I Timothy 6:4. He said: "He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings." And in the first part of verse 5 he continues: "Perverse disputings [questions] of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth. . . ." In verse 3, Paul makes it clear that he is here addressing the issue of doctrine—doctrine which had been revealed to him, given by Christ and God the Father.

Third, Paul writes to Titus, Titus 3:9 (8–11). He writes: "But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain." What foolish questions? From verse 8 it is very clear the previously given truths were a basis for faith and good works. These must be maintained. That is: They were to be adhered to in faith and confidence. Then verse 9 tells us the

called and converted are to reject and avoid all questions which generate doubt regarding revealed Truth.

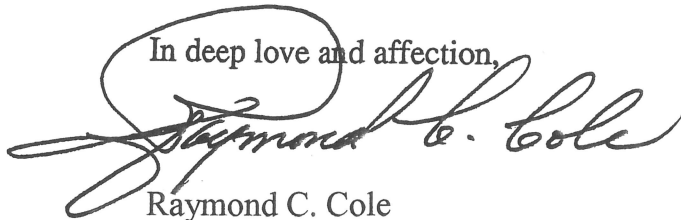
Finally, let us return to the area of Scripture where we commenced this Letter. In II Timothy 2:23 (23–26), the Apostle Paul gives the basis for the statements which he had made in chapter 3—the first quote made in this Letter. Chapter 2:23 reads: "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes." When did Paul say this condition would exist? In the last days, II Timothy 3:1.

In the last days a very real "questioning spirit" was prophesied to prevail. It would be a spirit which holds no confidence in the revealed Truth through God's chosen servant of the last days. A test which would grow in intensity as the last days progress toward the ultimate end. Note verse 13 of II Timothy 3. "... Evil men and seducers shall wax *worse and worse*, deceiving, and being deceived."

As a result of these conditions, which would prevail in these last days, what great and very serious obligation is imposed upon the faithful? Paul was inspired to prophesy, "... continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (II Tim. 3:14). The faithful will not depart from the revealed truth because of men. Their faith is in the Truth which God gave. They will neither generate nor hear questions which reflect against that revealed truth.

Other texts make it plain that they will also know those who labor in faith and purpose among them. God does not take lightly any evil, wrong-spirited, questioning of His revealed truth or of those whom He has made responsible for preaching and teaching that Way of life.

In deep love and affection,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Raymond C. Cole