

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren,

Warm and personal greetings to all once again. Our hearts and minds are encouraged each time we pause to think of you and to recall the many pleasant and mutually edifying conversations experienced over the months and years. You are loved and respected more than you can possibly know. Faithfulness is a priceless trait. It is a glorious characteristic. Few, indeed, are there who will during these troubling and perplexing times manifest such conviction and courage. On the behalf of both God and Christ may we expressly thank you for that continuity of purpose? Your Father and Elder Brother are pleased. That affection and love will only be enhanced as you more perfectly master the self and put on the divine nature which is required for salvation.

For the month of March the subject "What is the purpose for the written Word of God?" will be continued. A subject of such gravity, especially during these times of turmoil and virtual indifference, requires a thorough explanation. As the required study and analysis progress it becomes most apparent other facets need to be added to the basic outline initially employed in the writing of these *Monthly Letters*. It is our hope that the subject will be clearly understood by those whose minds and hearts are still in tune with the divine purpose of God manifested in the initial call given to each. Further, though a contentious mind is never subject to integrity, reason, and honesty of fact, we do hope that the material will be of such depth and incontrovertible in nature that even those so argumentatively oriented will be forced to accept the technicalities. For much of our material is not only to inspire and teach those whose hearts and minds are at peace and happy in that confidence proceeding from God, but also written to address serious flaws of reason and belief which too broadly prevail in the religious maelstrom of our day. Without adequate explanation and warning too many may be overcome by the gravity of subject material. The true sheep of God look for that protection and loving care.

Can anyone deny the historical fact, God, and He alone, gave His message to chosen servants from the time of Adam to Christ? That the message God gave to His Son Jesus Christ, His Son in turn delivered to the chosen apostles? And that Paul, though one born out of due time, was delivered a message comparable in every respect to that which was given to the initial twelve apostles? If words in the English language mean anything, the answers

to the above questions can only be given in the negative. To deny that fact can only be a severe form of deception or deliberate hiding from the realities of recorded documentation—the Bible.

Further, God's Word is spirit. For the benefit of men those words were reduced to letter form. That is, they were written on the pages of a book, or in some earlier situations on stone, stones, or pillars, etc. As words written in letter form, they lose none of their spiritual power or authority. The problem with those recorded, written, words is not intrinsic. The problem is in a personalized human relationship to them. First, understanding them with the human carnal mind is an impossibility. Second, obedience of carnal (human) minds to spiritual requirements is equally impossible. The whole history of Israel, as a nation, teaches us these facts in graphic fashion. For what purpose was the Word of God written and delivered to that nation, composed of carnal human beings? The answer to the foregoing question could have something to do with what is occurring today—both within the church and out of it.

In Retrospect

Christianity, and Christianity alone, has its roots in those truths and ways which God, through Moses, delivered to the nation of Israel. Based on the promises inherent in those truths delivered, Christ came at the appointed time to establish the New Testament church. Not long after the establishment of that society of believers, fracturing commenced. Soon there were many, and as time progressed a host of others joined, who departed from the way of life God had initially delivered to the apostles. What was the basis for this fracturing? How is it possible for dozens of differing concepts to be religiously believed and ostensibly supported by a single Book? And, if the mind of Christ is imperative to comprehend the truths of the Bible, how is it possible to believe that from that one mind comes so many and totally divergent beliefs? Further, not one of the many differing groups believes that its Leader, Savior, and/or God is someone other than the Christ mentioned in the New Testament. How can one sane mind be responsible for such diversity and confusion? Is Christ a multiple personality? From where do these manifold illogical concepts and beliefs come? What are the underlying causes of this divergent belief structure? There appear to be five significant causes which can be understood. And every one of those five reasons stems from the orientation of the natural, carnal, mind. They are the products of meticulous, studious, and deliberate research and study. From all the evidence which can be cited, if Biblical study as well as historical research make the acquisition of truth possible, there are many organizations who should have come to a profound level of spiritual understanding. Yet, as any observant individual knows, human research and study have precipitated many grievous contentions, splits in organizations, and the establishment of new groups. What are those five basic causes?

What Are Those Five Basic Causes?

First, there is an approach which can rightly be dubbed, "as I see it." It is a concept entirely predicated on the prowess of human mind. An implicit trust in that which occurs to one's natural mind. A belief that, based on natural study and intelligent research, God makes known His spiritual ways of life. These people trust the carnal mind—although due to the insidiousness of deception they probably have deluded themselves into believing that what has occurred to them mentally has come from the Spirit and is a gift from God. But, is not this the orientation of every human mind? Are we not told, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man . . ." (Proverbs 16:25)? Unfortunately, we are further informed that the consequence of pursuing that way results in death. Then, of even greater concern is the fact that *all* the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes (Proverbs 16:2). That can only mean all the thoughts which occur to an individual are deemed right and true. Man does not possess the inherent capability to be objective. Only God possesses such objectivity. See the last part of verse two. We read: ". . . but the Lord weigheth the spirits." That is, despite how the individual may view the matter—right in his own eyes—God weighs and evaluates the matter. Since the natural mind is always in opposition to the ways of the Spirit, in all probability what man thinks to be right will be error in the sight of God.

Due to the natural tendency for carnal man to see his own original conceptions, as well as those things which he reads, studies, and hears, in the light of what he thinks is right, the Apostle Paul wrote:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations [margin: reasonings] and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ . . ." (2 Corinthians 10:3–5).

Because human beings trust the powers of their own minds, they have confidence in the thoughts and conceptions which are generated from within. It is the way by which they see an issue; the way which seems right to them. Strangely, that is the very way which produces death, the way which the called of God must resist with the mind of Christ which dwells within. This obligation presupposes an unalterable standard by which such judgments must be made. After all, if a man cannot trust that which seems naturally and logically right in his own mind, he certainly is not going to submit to another influence unless he has implicit faith and confidence in that influence. For that reason the standard by which all judgment must be made is called, "the faith once delivered"—a faith which did not come by study, research, and personal endeavor. It came by the receipt of a special gift and by that means only. As long as a man lives he must continually guard against the tendency to resort

to the influence of the natural mind—reasonings. These evil and diabolical influences are always against that which was/is positive—the knowledge of God which comes only by divine revelation. The duty and responsibility of every called and faithful servant of God is to crush and resist the natural tendency to question that which was received initially. The converted person's human reasonings must be resisted daily. The faithful of God will not trust that which seems right to them. Their base of judgment will always be the knowledge of Christ which was revealed and delivered. Never will their actions be a manifestation of the example the Apostle Paul referred to when writing to Timothy. He said: "Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith" (2 Timothy 3:8). The truly called must never manifest unfaithfulness by refusing to accept and believe on the basis of revelation—a belief which did not come as a result, and therefore a product of, intense personalized research and study. It came because, as God revealed, you heard the truth proclaimed by a chosen servant, were convicted, and then surrendered your life on the basis of that conviction and belief. Our perfect example is that of Christ. Christ received the truth directly from the Father (John 12:49). The principle given by Peter is equally applicable to those called and who received the truth via an indirect means—through the preaching of a chosen messenger. Peter wrote:

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God (1 Peter 4:1–2).

For what reason did Christ suffer? Was it not due to the fact He bore the message of God, that He taught a way of life which was diametrically opposite to that which is believed and practiced by men? Why, then, do the called and chosen of God suffer? Is it not for the same reason? Rather than allowing himself to be ruled and controlled by natural lusts, the servant of God rules his life according to the revealed will of God. The lusts of the mind (reasonings) as well as the impulses of the flesh are controlled by the mind of the Spirit—based on the knowledge of Christ which came by revelation. As a carnal man sees issues and concepts, he gives direction to his life. Such is his *modus operandi*. The orientation of the flesh—not of the Spirit. It is the only avenue of direction natural, carnal, man can take. What else can he do? He cannot think outside of himself. He is by nature and mind what he is. Until God, by a miracle, provides an outside dimension, all mortal men are subject (in bondage) to the natural mind. As "they see" issues and concepts humanly will be their norm until called.

Now let us take serious note of the second basic cause of error in the natural orientation of the human mind.

Lusts of the Flesh

The mind of man is not governed by external principles of right. It is generally, if not totally, influenced by the lustful nature of the flesh. Specifically, in the very last days in which we live, the Apostle Peter writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit said:

. . . false teachers . . . privily shall bring in [the church] damnable heresies . . .
. . . And many shall follow their pernicious ways . . . chiefly them that *walk after the flesh in the lust* of uncleanness . . . (2 Peter 2:1, 2, 10).

Carnal man is subject to the dictates of his own lustful mind and nature. Lusts of the mind were addressed in the concept previously explained.

There is yet another compelling problem of man's natural lust. Often the concepts of mind are formulated on the basis of the dictates of the flesh itself. How frequently are the concepts of truth and error relating to the issue of divorce and remarriage established subjectively? Beliefs are governed by conditions which affect the individual. All that remains is the necessity of giving the issue Biblical authentication and a degree of respectability. The natural lustful nature of man will take over from there (vv. 18–19).

Tragically, far too many who once understood the truth God delivered to His chosen in the last days turned to their own lustful natures as a premise for making judgments—judgments which will adversely affect their lives in multitudinous ways. Those ways are ungodly. They are sensual, devoid of the Spirit—of any spiritual purpose or orientation. Because of the orientation of sensuality they will turn to mockery and contempt. Ridicule is the vehicle of purpose. Why? They dare not turn to the integrity and unchangeable nature of the Spirit once possessed. Since the flesh hates the Spirit, the response is to be expected.

When writing to the young evangelist, Timothy, the Apostle Paul clearly illustrated the above concept. Of the last days (2 Timothy 4:1) Paul stated:

[T]he time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

What was the reason for the rejection of the divinely revealed truth? It was the natural carnal lust resident within the flesh. And when selecting their teachers they diligently sought those who would predicate their concepts, beliefs, and preaching on those same untrustworthy influences. The force of their convictions is the influence of the lustful nature

with which they were born, not the power of conviction predicated upon faith in a divinely revealed way of life. The just shall live by faith. Is it possible that those who live according to the orientation of the lusts of the flesh could actually live also by required faith? Not unless up means down, east means west. For the concepts are contrary inherently the one to the other.

Jude, too, emphasized the orientation of those who once understood the truth of God. He wrote:

. . . remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit (Jude 17–19).

From a spiritual perspective, the world is the world. The called are the called—members of the body of Christ, the church. One who is not called and a part of the body of Christ is a part of the world. Therefore, the people mentioned in Jude who separated themselves can refer only to those who once were a part of that body called the church. Due to the powerful influence of their own lustful natures, they departed from the divinely revealed truth. The basis of the mental change which transpired was the powerful influence of their indigenous lusts. The Spirit of God can incisively evaluate and judge the orientation of flesh. On the other hand, it is impossible for the flesh to evaluate and comprehend the world of the Spirit. When one turns from the Spirit to the influence of natural lusts it is utterly impossible for that person to comprehend spiritual matters. There will be a religious facade, a pursuit of lustful concepts; the true Spirit of God will, however, be absent.

Of grievous concern to those continuing faithful is the realization that the above condition prevails within that body of the once faithful—brothers and sisters of the common salvation. Doctrines, concepts, and pursuits of life are now determined by many not by divine revelation but by the predominant "intellectual and academic" orientation of the carnal, rebellious, defiant, and lustful nature of mortal man. What we saw happen in the church, and continues to this day, was prognosticated in the first century (v. 18).

Third: Contempt for the Truth

The carnal nature of man, from the beginning, is opposed to God and the way of God (Romans 8:7). If logic is logic, it then follows naturally that those who have turned from the truth delivered will find themselves manifesting contempt for that way which they once believed. They will no longer love, respect, and hold dear those truths which formed the basis of their covenant agreement with God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Jude wrote:

. . . certain men crept in unawares . . . before of old ordained to this condemnation . . . turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness [lewdness, lustfulness], and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 4).

Due to the strong dictates of lust, some who once believed and practiced the truth turned that way of life upside down. Rather than turn from religion, these perverters used the power of man's lustful nature and the natural inclination to put on a religious orientation as a premise by which to dissuade those who believed and thereby persuade them to accept perversion as a necessary change. In effecting this transition from original obedience to the truth to a rejection of that way, it was necessary to generate total disrespect for divine revelation. Paul explained how this transition was accomplished. In 2 Thessalonians 2:10 we read, someone, presumably once called, will employ incredibly deceptive measures by which others of the called will lose interest turning from the faith, "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." Incredibly, those called of God, convicted of His way of life, repenting of their wrongs, and then practicing God's given way of life for years can turn away from that priceless possession. The fate of such is shocking. Paul continues (vv. 11–12), "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." There are those who turned away from the self-deprecating ways revealed by God to an unrighteous way which allows those so deceived to act on the natural lustful impulses of the flesh. To those who love the truth and desire to honor God, such actions are beyond understanding.

Fourth: Personality

Historically many actions and events occurred which would later form the basis, type, for those events destined to occur in these last days. Those events are recorded as a part of the Word preserved for us. One of those events was a dissimulation and perversion of the message and responsibility occurring within the ranks of the prophets. False prophets arose espousing contrary messages. The Apostle Peter said, in like manner "there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in [into the church] damnable heresies . . ." (2 Peter 2:1). The time element of Peter's prophecy is not given specifically. However, the parallel prophecy given in Jude gives us this missing dimension. It is the end time as indicated in verse 18.

Why would people turn from the truth received by divine revelation to "damnable heresies"? Because human beings turned to the powers of their own minds—they trusted what they had ascertained by "academic research" and "personalized study." How else would a physically normal—carnal—human being arrive at conclusions? In this case we are seeing

the literal fulfillment of a manifested failure to respond to the admonition given in 2 Corinthians 10:5 which warns: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ . . ." Instead of using the revealed truth as a means of testing and trying every thought which occurred, roles were reversed. Those so mesmerized by the powers of the human mind sought verification for revelation initially received and believed by using the powers of natural minds, via study and research, to test revealed spiritual knowledge. How can the mind of flesh, in any way, comprehend things of the Spirit, let alone be responsible for determining the verification of things of that Spirit?

Those arrogant of spirit will seek adequate justification to still the doubts of their natural minds in any changes sought and allowed. That is an absolute. Yet, one must ask, why would any one of the called follow in the pursuit of error—that which was developed from the premise of the human mind? Peter answers the question. He said: ". . . many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Peter 2:2). Error is given an aura of legitimacy due to the personality of the one advocating it. Such is a fundamental tendency actively employed by hundreds of interesting and powerful personalities in government, education, sociology, as well as religion. In fact, religion is probably the principle area in which this control mechanism is practiced. Because of its effectiveness in controlling and manipulating large numbers of people religiously, governments have appropriated it. All too frequently governments have sought, even demanding, a worshipful orientation of their constituency. Whether in religion or government a sublimely accommodating individual has abdicated moral and technical responsibility. Unless concepts generate from a "higher source" it is not possible for governments to reflect perfection personified. Perfection, an unalterable and immutable way, can come from God only. It is for that reason that men called of God must adhere, by faith, to that which God delivers in appointed times. Since no mortal today can see God, or talk to Him personally, the truth given can be accepted and practiced only by faith. We are clearly informed that the truth came in the life of Christ, was passed on to the next generation through the preaching of the apostles, called and personally trained by Christ Himself, and that same precise truth was to be taught in the last days. Acceptance and belief is possible only by faith. Further, since spiritual things are not physically demonstrable, there is a compelling influence which leads inexorably back into carnality even in the minds of those once called and knowledgeable of that priceless way of life. In this subtle, but inexorable, shift there is a gradual and ever-increasing loss of respect for the truth and an equally growing contempt and hatred for that which was once fervently and joyously accepted and believed. What are the fruits of those called, in these last days? Have we not seen the literal manifestation of conditions, attitudes, and activities prognosticated to occur within that body in these closing days? What is occurring is referred to as the signs of our time. A sign is useless unless it specifically identifies. Therefore, the self-justifying comment, "how can you believe these conditions are happening only within the body of the church which went

apostate?" is moot and irrelevant. Satan has always counterfeited. In the final analysis, only the truly called and faithful will see and know. How can anyone make an acceptable judgment call unless he initially possesses all the facts? Only the called and faithful possess the necessary information. Time will be most revealing. For the present, be aware that those who turn from the truth will manifest considerable contempt and hate for that which they once believed. They will have sought direction and inspiration, for many at least, from that personality which they elected to follow.

Fifth: Adverse Influence—Conformity

There is another influence which is virtually as strong and dynamic. It is the dynamics of conformity itself. The Apostle Peter put it this way: ". . . beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Peter 3:17). The power of carnality—both mentally and physically—is enormous. Numbers of people and personalities involved make it ever so much easier for the average lay member to make choice—even though that choice is error. Many find comfort in the fact the belief subscribes to basic desires of the flesh and mind—indigenous to all human beings—and to the fact that outstanding personalities involved aid in hiding their own individual responsibility in the conduct and decision making process for which they eventually will be held accountable. Like hyped up individuals who advocate causes, politically, these uninformed and emotionally oriented individuals are "led away with the error of the wicked." In so doing they fall from their own steadfastness. That is, there is evidenced a significant change in belief and practice.

In His earthly ministry, Christ stood alone. Tragically, even after three and one-half years of powerful speaking and the performance of hundreds of miracles, Christ gathered about Him, what appears to be, only a few hundred individuals (1 Corinthians 15:6) who really believed and practiced what they had been taught. Further, we are told that in these last days there would be very few who would find the truth and remain loyal to it (Matthew 7:13–14). Such a fact underscores the dire necessity of enduring the continuing test of faith which we all will experience in these final days prior to the return of Jesus Christ. Only that individual who endures to the end will be accounted worthy of everlasting life. The magnitude of such enduring presupposes an equally strong adverse influence—an influence generated out of the desires of the flesh, and mind, as well as the methods employed by hateful and diabolical individuals who seek the breakdown of the will and resolve of others.

Let us keep our perspective. Though much material will be covered in these foundational *Letters*, material necessary to understand principles which will be used to evaluate our considered subject, we should keep our eyes on the real issue. Is it possible for anyone to ascertain the truth of God from personalized study and/or research? If not, why the requirement to read and study the written Scriptures?

From the above five concepts, it is evident there are orientations of human minds which are totally unacceptable to God. Orientations which will not lead us to truth; rather they are avenues by which the natural inclinations are given free and acceptable expression.

In the May issue of this *Letter* we will thoroughly cover the critical results stemming from the five powerful motivators of mind and heart mentioned above. Once we have adequately covered many of the intrinsically related subjects, the answers to the primary questions posed will become obvious.

For this time, may we, once again, convey our love and respect to you all? We continue to remember you all in our daily prayers, and do trust that your prayers are equally fervent for us. Thank you for your continued faithfulness.

In deepest love and respect always,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'R' and 'C'.

Raymond C. Cole