

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren,

The writing and recording of the words which formed the Holy Canon covered a span of time in excess of fifteen hundred years—from the time of Job until the final writings of the Apostle John. Parts of the Bible have been available to specific peoples for many generations. Without doubt, many of these peoples have religiously read and studied those recorded Scriptures. Yet, Christ, who lived and taught at the close of that fifteen hundred year span of time, said only the prophets and some of the earlier patriarchs knew and understood what was contained in them. The masses—even of Israel—were constantly found in outright rebellion against the truths contained in those Scriptures.

It was the Apostle Paul, a few years after the time of Christ, who was inspired of the Holy Spirit to write, "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began. But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God . . ." (Rom. 16:25-26). The mystery of God's great plan for humanity and His physical creation existed from the beginning. The contents of that mystery were contained in the writings—parts of that which would later form the Holy Canon—of the prophets. No understanding of those written words existed, however, until the time of Jesus Christ and the apostles. At that time,—"*now*," said Paul—a revelation occurred. In comparable fashion, too, a revelation was given to the original twelve apostles. In Luke 24:44-45 Christ said, after His three and one-half years of personalized ministry of teaching His chosen disciples, ". . . These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. *Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.*" Obviously these chosen men had heard Christ many times refer to those written texts—that which is referred to as the Scriptures. They had heard the finest Teacher a man could have. But did they understand what was said? Not at all! Understanding came only at this point of miraculous revelation. And what was mysteriously contained in the writings of the existing parts of the Holy Canon? Jesus said: ". . . Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached

in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:46–48). Is not this the very thing the Apostle Paul said to the Romans? (Rom. 16:25–26) That which is called the way of life had to be revealed before it could be understood. If the way of life had to be revealed in the days of Christ and the apostles, are circumstances any different today? Availability of the written Word did not help in the time of Christ and the apostles. Having the best Teacher this world has ever known did not help them to understand. Understanding came only by divine revelation and at the time determined by Christ.

Christ came to make the mystery of salvation known—to reveal it to those whom the Father would choose. And that knowledge was received by a mysterious opening of the minds and hearts of those chosen. Prior to that call, mere human beings could not understand even that which was written in the Bible.

For generations people were, and continue to be, mesmerized by the writings of the Bible. The contents of that Sacred Canon have been interpreted, defined, and redefined by the carnal mind, lusts of the natural flesh, influences of Satan, personalities of men, and a host of other evil influences. Such carnal orientations of hearts and minds will inevitably bring about sordid consequences. What are these manifestations? Manifestations, indeed, but known and understood by those called and enlightened by God only.

There appear, Biblically, to be five ways by which men make the instructions of the Word of God conform to natural, carnal, expectations. By this means most men can live comfortably with their consciences. In their own eyes they are right. Whole libraries have been written to substantiate belief and practice.

What are those inordinate ways by which men construct belief and action? They will affect everything in the natural life, including structure, order, and all that is given by an authoritative and benevolent God. Do not expect any man to admit to employing these concepts or to apply them to himself. Such a manifestation would be the most significant indication of conversion—the time when men turn from the self, the carnal mind, and admit what they are, by nature, to themselves.

Perversion

The reality of things is undeniable. When the Words of God were delivered to the ancients and subsequently recorded, it was hard, if not impossible, to deny their existence. After all, nearly every direct intervention of God was accompanied by monumental signs and wonders. Remember the natural response of the Children of Israel on the day God voiced His law in that terrible and frightening manner? The devastating effect upon them when they

saw the Red Sea return to its place and the dead Egyptian soldiers floating on the water? The terror struck in the hearts of those who saw twenty-three thousand people die in one day for acts of disobedience?

Time erodes memory and fear. Usually, that space of time is quite limited, in some cases even days. The history of Israel proves that fact. Are we not the children of our forefathers—the Children of Israel who came up out of the land of Egypt? Why should it seem strange when people do exactly the same things today? They forget that which they heard and inspired them at the time of their call. Christ said that men love darkness. That is, they do not want the glare of truth, actuality—real light. In their minds and hearts they will do almost anything to alter, change, or in other ways make conformable to natural expectations any absolute. Since God's Words are absolutes, they are subject to the perversions of men's minds. Even after one is called and granted an understanding of the real truths of God, the natural mental tendency must be carefully monitored and repressed daily. Every thought and concept we have is not of God. All thoughts, all words, must be tried against some standard. If this is not done then, indeed, every man will be right in his own sight. And what is that standard? There is only one! That standard is the revealed word—the truth God gives in appointed times.

From New Testament instruction and example let us understand the power and insidiousness of that human tendency to pervert.

Regarding the time and conditions then extant, the Apostle Paul wrote a warning that is equally applicable today. Man shall not live by bread alone; but he is required to live by every word of God. That means the following instructions are applicable to you and me—*now*. Paul said: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy [Spirit] hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:28–30). To the Galatian churches he wrote: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6–7).

The very definition of the word "pervert" implies an initial receipt of the truth followed by, at some later date, a tampering with that which was received. Such perversions, obviously, cannot occur at any place and time outside of those times when God gives that divine revelation to those whom He chooses. It is impossible to pervert that which one does not possess.

Regarding the last days, the cardinal example—ancient Israel—wrote hard and bitter lessons. Those lessons are recorded for us upon whom the ends of this age are come, as well as historical examples for the actual Children of Israel, physically, in these last days. Jeremiah wrote: "Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord. A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the Lord their God. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. For shame hath devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God" (Jer. 3:20–25). Beyond doubt, that which occurred to ancient Israel was recorded for the church of the last days (Rom. 15:4, I Cor. 10:6, 11, I Pet. 1:10–12). The prophets in general were made aware of this fact. Only today are people confused and refuse to accept the intent and purpose of those written words of God. No one intelligently denies the fact these instructions apply to the modern day Children of God—physically. Yet, it must be understood, the real spiritual meaning is found in their application to the church of these last days—Israel of the Spirit (Gal. 6:16). Israel of the heart—the Spirit—was destined to depart from the way given to them. This departure has occurred. Thankfully, some, if not all, will eventually recognize that fact and plead with God for restoration. Why such need of restoration? Because they perverted the truths given to them. Yet, in due time, God will manifest a desire for the work of His own hands. The tragedy will be the level of experience—trials and tribulation—required to reorient the minds and hearts of those called and chosen.

Israel of the flesh was chosen from the foundation of the world. Likewise, the Israel of the Spirit was chosen from the foundation of the world. To God's chosen were given the truths—the ways of life. Once received it was possible for them, in the case of Old Testament Israel, to obey the letter of that way of life. In respect to the chosen of today, it became possible for the chosen to obey in the Spirit. In either case, these are the only ones who could pervert that which was given. Where is there any indication that Gentiles, those outside of the nation of Israel, were accused of perverting the truth? How can anyone pervert that which he does not possess? Israel had received the truths of God and because of the influence of their own natures they had perverted that which had been given to them. In like manner, those of the chosen today have perverted the truths which were given to them. Today's perversion is of the Spirit, not of the flesh. A far more serious condition. Jeremiah prophesied of this perversion. He wrote: "And the burden of the Lord shall ye mention no more: for every man's word shall be his burden: for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the Lord of hosts our God" (Jer. 23:36). Of those called to understand the

truths of God, some, by perverting that which they had received, are under an excessive burden not given by God—a burden of their own making. Their words will prove to be their greatest enemy. They perverted that which God gave and turned to their own words. This is a condition which will apply in these last days (v. 20).

Regarding these last days, what warning is given for the benefit of all who are the called—those to whom the truth had been given? Remember, though predicated on historical examples, the Bible, the Word of God, is recorded for the benefit, also, for those living in these last days.

First, let us consider Paul's experience. Quoted above is Acts 20:28–30. Paul warns of major perversion creeping into the church—perversion coming from those who had received the truth but who did not love that way of life and therefore found tampering with that special gift a means by which to gain the adherence of followers. In that context Paul gave a most serious warning. He said, "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (vv. 31–32). Perversion did not occur outside of the church. It was to transpire within. How were the faithful to guard against the influence of such perversion? Clearly, Paul said, the standard of judgment was the Word which Christ had delivered to him by divine revelation. That same principle applies today. As a part of the Word of God, these instructions are relative to our time and circumstance. Paul emphasized this concept when writing to the Galatians. He emphatically stated that neither angel nor man had a right to alter that which is given by God. Then he said, ". . . I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11–12).

Even when human beings are called of God, if there does not exist a real element of faith and an absolute love for the truth given, they tend to pervert that unalterable revelation. It is virtually impossible for men to resist the temptation to apply the powers of their own minds. In so doing they will construct doctrines which "seem right to them."

The standard of judgment is that truth given to Christ. He did not speak His own words. He spoke that which the Father had given to Him (John 12:48–49). And that which He had given to the apostles was that which the Father had given to Him (John 17:8). Regarding the last days, that which Christ taught was, also, given to a chosen servant (Matt. 28:19–20).

What had been given by divine revelation was perverted—in the time of Christ, the days of the apostles, including Paul, and in these last days. The very act of perversion

implies an initial receipt of the truth. It is by study that human beings pervert the truth. It is by a mysterious call and a divine revelation that the called receive the truth of God. After that, only real and genuine faith will sustain us in the manifold times we will be subjected to powerful mental influences of Satan.

A crucial question must be answered. If an understanding of the Word of God comes by personal study and research, why are all the perversions extant today the result of that same study and research? Can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit?

The concept of perversion implies, "to turn away, to distort, twist, or to transform into something of an opposite character." See *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, page 862.

There are other clever manipulations of men. Ways by which received truth is massaged, changed, and made to appear or seem legitimate. Ways chosen by gullible and unsuspecting members who do not realize what is happening to them.

Corruption

W. E. Vine defines the Greek words translated into English as "corrupt," "corruption," and "corruptible" in this manner. "To hucksterize . . . that is, to get base gain by dealing in anything or . . . to do anything for sordid personal advantage . . . the effect of evil company upon the manners of believers, and so of the effect of association with those who deny the truth and hold false doctrine . . . marring a local church by leading it away from that condition of holiness of life and purity of doctrine in which it should abide . . . to corrupt utterly . . . corrupted in mind whose wranglings result from the doctrines of false teachers . . . reprobate concerning the faith" (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, pp. 244–245).

First, let us consider a couple of long-range prophecies. Regarding Israel, whose actions wrote indelible lessons for us today, Moses was inspired to write: "For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands" (Deut. 31:29). Is physical Israel obedient to the laws and ways of God today? Have they been obedient at any time in this common era of time? Of course not! Then, how is it possible for them to turn away from God? Every indication Biblically, implies a wayward people who do not know God and have not been obedient since the days of Moses. These being facts, it, then, is impossible to relate the above warning to the physical peoples of Israel. The only other option is that of spiritual Israel—the church of these last days. The church did apostatize.

It turned from God, the truths given. They continue corrupting themselves at a very rapid pace. And in short order, the prophesied evil will befall them. It is inevitable.

Regarding the chosen of God in these last days Daniel was inspired to write: ". . . such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits" (Dan 11:32). Some who knew the truth will turn against that way of life and will be subject to the evil influence of a great political power. Because of great pressures some will be corrupted. They will, for self protection, accept bribes and accolades. They know the truth but due to fear will surrender their spiritual will and purpose. In so doing they will become the adversaries of those who will and purpose to remain strong in the faith which God gave. Corruption can occur both from willful rebellion against the truth delivered as well as from weakness which keeps one from standing tall and firm in resolve and purpose.

The point to remember is this: Truth had been received. Only because of human frailty did these people justify change, or corruption, of that which they had received.

Now let us review a number of New Testament texts which will enhance the understanding of our considered subject. Four of them are from the pen of the Apostle Paul. The final one is from Jude.

"For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." Paul spoke that truth which God had revealed to him. He delivered to the people precisely that which had been committed to his trust. Yet, there were members who had come into the Body of Christ who deemed it necessary to alter or change that which had been given. First came the truth, followed by corruption. Any corruption implies an initial purity. But how did corruption come about in the minds of those people? If they did not receive the concepts directly from Satan, then, it becomes quite evident that the problem stemmed from the employment of the powers of carnal minds. Resorting to that which seems right to them. Most people do not deliberately turn to that which they know to be wrong. Usually, the concepts and ideas of human beings stem from personal study, a process of reasoning, or some form of research. In some cases people's concepts are formed by some highly venerated or esteemed individual. They are inherited. In all cases, the origin is the same. They stem from carnal minds turned loose.

Again the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. He said: "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with [it]" (II Cor. 11:2-4). The seed of change is in the natural mind. Human minds, under devious, evil, influence can be corrupted. That is, they will lose their love for that which was received in faith—the

truth—and will turn to deception. They will turn to that which seems right to them. Whereas, the foundation of truth is faith. It manifests faith and confidence in that which was delivered and accepted initially. There is no recorded time during which the truth was not first delivered to a chosen messenger. Upon hearing the message of that sent servant of God, the called responded in faith and conviction. Then, the hallmark of the faithful is continuity in that which was first received.

Again, considering our subject, it is imperative that we take note of the fact, human study and research is that which led to a corruption of the delivered truth. Can anyone deny the fact, truth was first delivered to the Apostle Paul? Corruption of the Word of God, then, is the tampering with initially revealed truth. There is a proper place for study and research, however, and a purpose for personal Bible study. That we shall understand in due time. For the present, let us concentrate on specifics which must first be understood.

To the Evangelist Timothy, Paul wrote: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ [The claims of men are null and void. The words of Christ are those given by the Father to Him, the words which He, in turn, gave to the twelve apostles, and the same words which were delivered to a servant in the last days.], and to the doctrine which is according to godliness: He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself" (I Tim. 6:3–5). What corrupted those minds? A departure from the truth given. Once the mind loses a simplicity of faith, it becomes argumentative and strife-filled. It is no longer pliable and teachable. What was the basis for this corruption? Personal study and research upon which great human faith and confidence were placed. The letter form of the Word of God has formed the foundation for nearly all, if not all, religious arguments throughout human history. Can such an orientation form the basis for divine revelation? No, not at all! Once again, please remember: a corrupt tree cannot produce good fruit. Once a mind becomes corrupted it is almost impossible for it to be, ever again, oriented spiritually.

Of these very last days, Paul wrote to Timothy: ". . . so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith" (II Tim. 3:8). These were, and are, students of the Bible, the written Word. In verse 7 we read: "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." The one common denominator of all these diverse groups: They hate the truth of God which was initially delivered. They will be obedient to anything but to that way of life which was first received. Corruption stems from a refusal to accept divine revelation—a revelation which must come through a servant called and commissioned by God and Christ. Jude made this point very clear. He wrote: "But these [someone within the church during the last days] speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves" (Jude 10). They are members who turned back to the natural pulls of the flesh and mind.

Corruption of God's Word stems from the called who turn to the powers of natural minds, and are influenced by the pulls of the flesh. All doctrines which are not based on divine revelation are based on Satanic influence or the pulls of the carnal mind. How strongly we must guard against such influences (II Cor. 10:1–5). Personal study and research were never intended, by God, to be *the source* of revelation. (Revelation comes from God's Spirit.) For such would produce a conflict of concepts, all strongly defended by those who generated them. Indeed, every man would be right in his own eyes.

The above concepts of perversion and corruption are but manifestations of a more insidious human trait: interpretation. Everyone wants the right to read the Scriptures and then come to his own conclusions regarding meaning and significance. As we have seen in previous *Letters* the underlying fabric of human interpretation is a host of carnal tendencies—lust, greed, family ties, work, and almost anything which might be affected adversely by belief or practice.

The third of the five manifestations of letter study of the word and research is interpretation. Seizing that "right" will insure anyone of believing and practicing doctrines which conform to carnal expectations. Change of human nature is not, then, necessary. All one needs to do is reconstruct doctrine according to the demands of flesh.

Interpretation

The Corinthian church was plagued with this problem. Everyone wanted the right to say his "piece" before the congregation. Chaos reigned in the church. Necessitating instruction, as well as a rebuke, from the Apostle Paul. He wrote: "How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying" (I Cor. 14:26). The tenor of the warning indicates behavior far from that which is to be expected from those claiming conversion. What was the necessity of interpretation? Was not this a responsibility borne by the ministry and to be practiced only under the inspiration of God and Christ? We shall see a text, later, which certainly implies this orientation of responsibility. To the Corinthians Paul continued: "What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:36–37). Obviously, some were taking exception with the message and authority of the Apostle Paul. They refused to accept the message. Yet, they assumed that they were equally inspired. However, they had forgotten how they came to the knowledge which they at that very time possessed. Did it not come through the preaching of the Apostle Paul? They had heard and responded. It did not come to them directly as a divine revelation. It came through the Apostle Paul. Strange how some human beings come to the knowledge of the truth through

a divinely inspired servant of God and then themselves become the ultimate authority and teacher. They forget how they came to the truth. Perspective is totally lost.

Is any of God's Word subject to individual interpretations? If the natural tendency of man is to interpret the Words of God according to how he sees them, is it possible there could be any justification for private interpretations? Peter wrote: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (II Pet. 1:20). In the Greek the word "private" is linked, in a nominative sense, to the word "interpretation." The Greek word is *epilusis*, meaning "to loose, solve, explain, denotes a solution . . . 2 Pet. 1:20, (of private) interpretation; i.e., the writers of Scripture did not put their own construction upon the 'God-breathed words they wrote" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 608). If those who wrote the Words of God did not, indeed, could not, advance their own interpretations, how is it possible for those living later to interpret authoritatively by application of their own mental input? If, then, men in general are not authorized to interpret the Scriptures of God, who may? Another text may give us a clue. In Hebrews 5:11 we read: "Of whom [Christ, vv. 7-10] we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing." The expression "hard to be uttered" in the Greek is "hard of interpretation." Interpretation by whom? In context, it is plainly evident the ministry is inferred. But, why was it difficult for the ministry to address needed interpretation regarding the life of Christ? The people were hard of hearing; that is, they were critical, defiant, reluctant, or in some other way resisting ministerial instruction. And what was the only basis approved of God for teaching and instructing those He would call and choose? Only divine revelation, that way of life which He delivered to His own chosen messengers.

Wresting

The fourth manifestation of trust and confidence in one's own ability to study and research the truth is called wresting—wresting the Scriptures. One who already lives in ignorance of the meaning of Scripture cannot wrest them. The very definition of the word requires an initial understanding of the truth. Then it is possible to wrest them. The Greek word is *strebloo*. It means "to twist, to torture (from *streble*, a winch or instrument of torture, and akin to *strepheo*, to turn), is used metaphorically in 2 Pet. 3:16 . . ." (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 1262).

To whom and of whom is Peter writing in II Peter 3:16? The text reads, "As also in all his [Paul's] epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." In the church were those who had no confidence in that which the apostles were teaching. They had no faith in the divine revelation which those apostles all received. Can anyone deny that as a fact? They had heard the truth but a genuine love and respect for it had not been engendered in their hearts and minds. They had more

confidence in their own ability to read that which was written and to interpret it according to the desires of their own carnal, lustful, minds.

To whom was the warning given? And what was the means of avoiding the same fate? To be led away these people had to evidence initially some mental orientation. What was that orientation? They believed the Scriptures which were interpretatively revealed by the instruments of God—the apostles. Steadfastness in the belief of that revelation was essential in order not to be led away (II Pet. 3:17).

Again, personalized study with the intent to comprehend meaning and purpose led some into grievous error. How is it possible for that which leads to error to be the very source by which truth is revealed and understood?

Tradition

The final manifestation of confidence and trust in personalized study and research is tradition. That which has a long historical past and is commonly accepted seems to generate confidence and assurance. But is such trust warranted?

To the Jews were committed the oracles of God. How did their traditions fare in the sight of Jesus Christ? (See Matt. 15:2-9, parts.) They complained to Christ, "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" A question to which Christ responded, ". . . Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" Christ gave his interrogators several examples. Then he concluded, ". . . Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

These were people chosen of God. They had been given the truth in a most miraculous manner. Even so, the natural mind insisted on interpreting that which was given. Even physically, technically, they refused to be faithful to the way given. Throughout their long history they had altered, changed, the word given to suit the times and circumstances in which they lived. Their doctrines were determined by the lust of the flesh and mind. These people had an elaborate system of technical research and personalized study of the Bible. But, did they come to the knowledge of the truth?

Harking back to traditional explanations will not guarantee a knowledge of the truth any more than manipulating the Scriptures in the other four ways will produce divine knowledge. Real truth does not come by any endeavor of men.

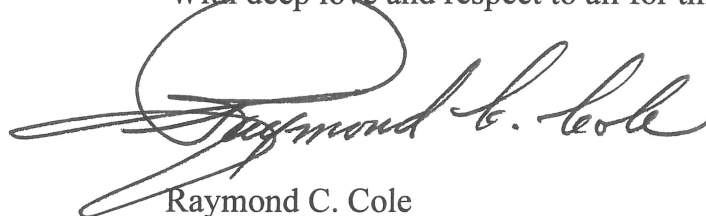
For those who have ears to hear specific warnings are given. In Colossians 2:8 the Apostle Paul gave a very stern warning. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." The basis of every religious tradition generated by men in the Western World is the Bible. How do men come to such concepts, myths? Either by the mental input of Satan, man's archenemy, or by man's own personal study and research. How can the called judge such matters? By the faith—doctrine—once delivered. Anything other than that singular standard cannot help but be the opinions generated by men. Simply because people elect to believe such concepts, even by the millions, does not mean that they are right.

What is the tradition which will sustain you in the times of trial and difficulty? In two texts the Apostle Paul gives sufficient instruction. II Thessalonians 2:15 says, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions *which ye have been taught*, whether by word, or our epistle." To the same church he wrote, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us."

The mark of obedience is faithfulness to that which was taught, proclaimed by a chosen and commissioned minister of God. Personalized study and research is not the means by which the called of God come to a knowledge of the truth. Then, why should we study God's Word? There are significant reasons. Those reasons will come in due time.

In our next issue on this subject we are going to address the matter of technical research and study. During a historical time when great minds with fervent expectations addressed Biblical matters. Once we have given sufficient consideration to all matters which relate to the subject under consideration, we will turn to the crux of the issue, why should we study and read the Scriptures?

With deep love and respect to all for this time,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Raymond C. Cole