

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

Due to time constraints and an urgent need to address other issues, we have not been afforded the opportunity to add other parts of the comprehensive subject, "What Is the Purpose for the Written Word of God?" It is our intent, God willing, to complete this subject without any significant interruptions henceforward.

Before entering the main body of the material determined for this issue of the *Monthly Letter*, a few analytical observations seem to be in order. They are as follows.

Since "all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes" how is it possible to come to the oneness of absolute truth—required by God—by individualized study? Which man is right? Is it possible to know the absolute truth? The one and only doctrine?

The net historical result of personal study, in general, has always been individualization. Each man is convinced of his own accuracy. Logic tells us there is something imperative that lies beyond the area of what seems right to the individual. To repeat, all history is a substantiation of the fact personalized study and thinking have only produced division and confusion. Arguments galore are the consequence! Again, is it possible to know an absolute and unalterable concept—the eternal truth? If so, how? And of even greater significance by far is the question, if absolute knowledge is made available can and will men respond to it?

Acceptance of absolute truth requires faith. It is called "the faith once delivered." Since faith is defined, by God, as "the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1), it ought to be abundantly clear that such knowledge does not—indeed, cannot—come from personalized study. And personalized knowledge is what we come to see, understand, and accept wholly on the basis of our own physical and mental effort. But "spiritual truth" comes only by a call from God and a divine revelation. If faith is faith, then spiritual truth does not come from personalized study. It is a gift, a gift of faith. If it comes from personal study it is neither a matter of call or faith.

Much of God's Word has been written for centuries. Moses was required to write a sizeable amount of the revealed—to him personally—Word of God. Yet, it is clearly stated that the real meaning of those written words was not understood until the time of Christ and the apostles (Rom. 16:25–26). If such knowledge comes from individualized study, why such a lack of knowledge and understanding until the time of Christ and the apostles? Why was not that Word understood by the people who had read and studied those Scriptures prior to the time of Christ and the apostles?

Further, if truth and understanding come by personal study, why the necessity of preaching by a chosen ministry? Since God alone chooses, ordains, and commissions ministers, does it not seem logical that He would have purpose for this activity? That purpose is clearly spelled out in Romans 10:1–17. And that purpose involves hearing and understanding what is preached, not merely compelling people to look into their Bibles and act on that which seems right to them. Truly, if understanding and the knowledge of God's way of life comes by individual and personal study, all preaching is in vain!

The end product of personal study is that which seems right to the individual. Pray tell, why would anyone pervert, twist, corrupt that which seems right to him? In fact, the very potential for human beings to corrupt the Word of God is an absolute proof of the necessity for divine revelation. Why? Changeable man will always revise his thinking according to the mores, pressures, conditions, and circumstances of the times in which he lives—revising what seems right to him. They are convinced of what they see and think they understand. The only means of checking and verifying the concepts of man is by the unchanging eternal standard of absolute truth which must in turn come from an unchanging and eternal Being.

And finally, if understanding is a matter of personal study, why has the Bible become the focus of man's greatest arguments? Letter—physical—obedience, that which occurred under the terms of the Old Covenant, was possible. Yet, in such obedience was never found the promise of everlasting life, only physical blessings (compare II Cor. 3:6–11, Deut. 5:31–33; 6:1–2). However, God knew that the nature of man would not allow him to remain faithful (Deut. 5:27–29). And even if they had managed to be physically obedient such obedience would have been a mere manifestation of self-righteousness (Deut. 6:25, Rom. 10:1–3). The premise for the diversity of concepts taught throughout history. A far cry from what God requires (Isa. 64:6).

Now to the main concept for this issue of the *Monthly Letter*.

A sincere apology for the orientation of this particular *Monthly Letter*. We do not know a simple and explanatory way to present the material. To be of value, you must

personally study and reflect upon the contents. The following material, however, is essential for an acceptable explanation of the subject.

According to all historical information available to us the Scribes of Christ's day were incredibly learned, erudite, and technically proficient. Did they understand the message which Christ brought?

Who were the Scribes?

The Hebrew word is *saphar*—a primitive root, meaning to score with a mark as a tally or record (*Strong's Concordance*). From the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, article "Scribes," we read: "Body of teachers whose office was to interpret the Law to the people, their organization beginning with Ezra, who was their chief, and terminating with Simeon the Just. The original meaning of the Hebrew word *soferim* was 'people who know how to write'; and therefore the royal officials who were occupied in recording in the archives the proceedings of each day were called scribes (comp. II Sam viii. 17; II Kings xix. 2, passim [in various places]; but as the art of writing was known only to the intelligent, the term 'scribe' became synonymous with 'wise man' (I Chron xxvii. 32). Later, in the time of Ezra, the designation was applied to the body of teachers who, as stated above, interpreted the Law to the people. Ezra himself is styled 'a ready scribe in the law of Moses' (Ezra vii. 6). Indeed, he might be correctly so called for two reasons, inasmuch as he could write or copy the Law and at the same time was an able interpreter of it."

That the office and title continued to the time of Christ is abundantly evident from the multiple usage during His day. Scribes were one of the three major designations of Judaism at that time. Christ refers to them many times. The apostles were likewise aware of the group. From the context of the four gospels and other areas only incidentally, what information can we glean about these erudite people?

First, it is imperative that we understand just how truth comes and is understood. Without doubt, though not spiritually understood, the truth is contained in the written Word of God. Second, though proficient in physical knowledge of that written word, the Jews did not have the real truth of God abiding in themselves. Why? Third, understanding comes only by the recognition of the one(s) commissioned and sent. Fourth, physical understanding of the Scriptures can be terribly deceptive. Fifth, though misunderstood, the written word contains the essence of the spiritual purpose of God. Please carefully study and analyze John 5:38–39. Can anyone gainsay the above?

Now let us understand what Christ and other servants of God had to say about the Scribes. In respect to the above concepts the Apostle Paul had some significant statements to make about them. "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring

to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the *scribe*? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom *knew not God*, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:19–21). By erudition and human disputation the learned of the past, including the Scribes, did not know God. Knowing God is the very essence of salvation (John 17:2–3). Note very carefully: Salvation comes by hearing and believing those sent by God.

Christ knew that the Scribes had a good physical knowledge but that their hearts were not right. For what other good reason would Christ have warned the people to beware of them? (Mark. 12:28–40) In another text He emphasized the significance of their technical knowledge (Matt. 13:47–52). The recognition of that physical capability is underscored in Matthew 2:4–5.

Technical, physical, knowledge, yes. But did they really understand the intent and purpose of that which they knew? Were the Scribes constrained by an understanding of what they physically knew? Absolutely not! Those called, converted, and knowledgeable of the intent and purpose of the Scriptures must exceed the response of the physically obedient (Matt. 5:17–20). In a nutshell—technical knowledge is absolutely inadequate. Yet, we must take note how the physically minded assume a critical and arrogant attitude toward those spiritually minded, as exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ. They always are right in their own eyes, employing a carnal evaluation of the Scriptures. Evaluate and compare Matthew 15:1–9, Mark 7:1–5, Luke 15:2, and 20:39–47.

A single trait most frequently characterizes those who either assume Scriptural prowess or are indeed knowledgeable. They will almost invariably contend with those to whom God revealed a spiritual understanding of His Word. Note a number of examples relating to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

- A. Those who had no knowledge of the mechanism of healing or spiritual significance (Matthew 9:1–8, Mark 2:6, Luke 5:21; 6:7)
- B. Feelings of contempt, frustration, and self-justification can lead to character assassination or even murder. (Matthew 16:21; 20:17–19, Mark 8:31; 10:33–34, Luke 9:27)
- C. Jealousy plays an integral part in the rejection of truth. (Matthew 21:12–16)
- D. Fear of people, not of God, regulates the lives of those physically oriented. (Matthew 26:1–5, 57)

- E. The viciousness of the carnal, physically knowledgeable—when presuming themselves to be hurt—is not inclined toward empathy for others.
(Matthew 27:35–44, Mark 15:31)
- F. The carnally oriented—with physical knowledge—are quick to judge those acting on spiritual knowledge.
(Mark 2:15–17)

Admittedly knowledgeable, yet the Scribes manifested no real spiritual understanding of that Word which they handled. Such knowledge and the power to perform can come only from a specific call and the gift of the Holy Spirit. That fact, however, does not mean that those technically—albeit carnally—oriented defer in spirit and attitude to the called and truly knowledgeable. Contempt, contention, and even murder will reign in their evil hearts and minds. The spiritually minded are able to read the fruits borne, both of those of the world as well as themselves. The reverse is not possible. The unconverted cannot read orientation and purpose of those called.

By parable, example, and specific event Christ contrasted those who speak and act on the basis of human reason and tradition with those who speak authoritatively by revelation, faith, and absolute conviction. Christ taught authoritatively because He had been given the message from His Father (Matt. 7:29, Mark 1:22). He knew the truth and was totally convicted by faith. By contrast the Scribes, those who had much technical knowledge and were the handlers of the Word of God, must have equivocated. The contrast was of sufficient magnitude that the people were intensely aware of the difference.

Though in positions of power, the physically oriented are hypocritical due to a lack of conversion and proper spiritual orientation. They may manifest confidence in their own physical ability, as did the Scribes in Christ's day, yet, become a giant impediment to growth and direction of others. Such people may be ill-fated (see Matt. 23:2–4, 13–15, 23–29, 34–36). Their religious orientation is for show. They want to be seen as good regardless of what is really dwelling in the hearts and minds. God is much more concerned with what is on the inside—the heart and mind. Tragically, there was much evidence that the Scribes had immense letter knowledge of the Bible—the Scriptures.

Rather than accept by faith the truths of God, delivered by a chosen servant, the technically—letter—oriented will set the minds to working. They reason; and as one well known individual once said, "they reason well." The problem is that reason will not bring any one to the knowledge of the truth. The Scribes with all their erudition reasoned. They felt confident due to their vast learning. But they were wrong. In Mark 2:6 the Greek word *dialogizomai* means "to bring together different reasons, to reckon up the reasons, to reason, revolve in one's mind, deliberate" (*Strongs*). Here the very manifestation of the Word of life

stood. Yet, these scholarly individuals were attempting to evaluate critically. The result of such action is invariably error, no matter how astute and learned the individuals involved.

Severe and critical analysis generally, if not always, stem from a lack of knowledge and conversion. Please note the last-day manifestation of this disease of the mind as defined in Jude 8–11. Christ was no exception. Though the Son of God, He was severely criticized—usually on the basis of some letter orientation of one of the Jewish groups of His day. In this incident we take special note of the Scribes—the proficient handlers of the Word of God (Mark 2:15–28, Luke 5:30–32).

What we do not understand, especially if it counters what we want to believe or that which grants us recognition and acceptance in some organization of men, the unconverted will reject (Mark 3:22–30). In fact, to justify the self and personal convictions derived from the prowess of mind, some men will even go so far as to imply, or outright state, that the inspiration of that which they do not want to accept is from Satan or one of his cohorts. In most cases such accusations are completely illogical at best, and at worst are very dangerous.

Divine truth is thoroughly substantiated by the written Word of God. Conversely, revealed truth cannot come from personal study of the written Word. If such were possible, then one must ask, why does not every soul which reads and studies the Bible understand the meaning? Perversion and wresting of the Scriptures is the common hallmark of those attempting to substantiate personal convictions and beliefs from a technical, letter, study of the Bible (Mark 7:1–13). By contrast, Christ, though using the written Word on many, many occasions, taught according to that which the Father had delivered to Him. The written Word was the substantiation of what had been given to Him. Of course, there can never be any disagreement between the revealed truth and that which is recorded. The problem lies in the fact human beings interpret the written Word according to times, pressures, and conditions which affect them. What a family taught when growing up. Concepts of a particular organization. Frailties of the flesh. Others.

The Scribes possessed an astounding knowledge of the physical, technical. By the time of Christ their warped traditions had become dogma—dogma which they believed had come from the recorded Word of God. Yet, how tragically their beliefs had departed from the revealed—though letter—way of life which God had given to Moses and was stoutly defended by Ezra, a faithful old-time scribe. Letter knowledge will neither guarantee us truth or keep us faithful. Men are perverters. All for personal advantage.

How many times have human beings deceived themselves just to hold to their own dogma or convictions? (Mark 14:1–2) A trait of all human beings, mortals. Convictions, however, are tempered by fear. Such wresting is possible to the physical mind. For the

spiritual mind—the mind of absolutes—such perversion is anathema. They are controlled by the mind of the unalterable, unchanging.

Interestingly, as employed by Christ Himself, a simple question tells the complete story. "Whom say the people I am?," He asked. Then as if to test the disciples, He asked: "But whom say you that I am?" (Luke 9:18–20) That same question still resounds down through the corridors of time, especially in these last days. Do people know? Knowing the answer to that simple question is the foundational knowledge of everlasting life. Knowing the answer to that question gives the power and ability to totally surrender to God (Luke 9:18–26). That knowledge can come only by divine revelation (compare John 5:37 and Matt. 11:25–27).

Those empowered with the absolute truth speak with conviction and authority. Such conviction and power are offensive to many—even those who think they understand the Scriptures (Luke 20:1–8). Their contempt and consternation get them into trouble. They presumed to ask a leading question. When Christ countered with a comparable question they were left humiliated and embarrassed. To have given an answer according to what they knew and what the people had accepted would have left them without excuse. It was easier to refuse to answer. The way of a coward. In fact far too many people fear men—they will go to any lengths to avoid confrontations with fellow mortals (Luke 22:2). Yet, when feeling secure in physical circumstances they will mock, deride, ridicule and otherwise manifest great courage and presumed conviction (Luke 22:63–71). When conditions change, they will run for cover and manifest their true nature and heart. What a deceptive lot we, as human beings, are. It is a wonder that there exists any worthwhile potential for us.

How many times is the spiritual reality of a situation contrary to what seems to be an open and closed issue? The Jews thought they had Christ behind the "eight-ball" in this situation. They had caught this woman in the actual act of adultery (John 8:1–11). This was now a squeeze play of the most demanding sort. They were testing Christ. Little did they realize how the tables would be so completely turned on them. By the time Christ had finished with the story, the accusers—every last one of them—fled for cover. What happened? They had overlooked two significant factors. Their own guilt and the essence of true spirituality. Christ simply refused to condemn her; but, said, "Go and sin no more." He did not justify the act. Neither did He rail at her. She was human; so He, in essence, forgave her. Then, He punctuated a potent spiritual principle. Do not continue to behave in an immoral manner.

Letter study will not produce a spiritual understanding. That comes only by a revelation—a revelation which is given to chosen servants and in turn taught by them for the benefit of those whom God wills to call. The Scribes were expert in the knowledge of the

"letter." They interpreted according to the dictates of the flesh. And they had no spiritual orientation in that which they thought they understood.

In the ultimate analysis what is the pivotal hallmark of a genuine and true servant of God? Faithfulness. The antithesis? Would it not be the exact opposite—faithlessness? In one of Christ's deep and often mystifying examples by which He taught, the verity of the above was amply proven. The example is found in Matthew 12:38–39. Why would anyone who sincerely believes and knows the truth seek a sign as verification? Does not that fact alone prove that a physical understanding does not produce faith? Further, does not real and genuine faith produce unalterable conviction, assurance? Physical knowledge, that which comes from the natural mind, cannot, and never will, produce faith! Faith is a *gift* of God received through the Holy Spirit. Faithlessness is a manifestation of those technically, physically, oriented.

The Scribes were aware of the contents of specific sections of the written word. Did they not know about prophecies related to Elijah (Matt. 17:9–13, compare Mark 9:11, 14, 16). This is a classic example of knowing specific knowledge but a failure to comprehend its true and genuine spiritual significance. How many people likewise know certain parts of the Bible but have no spiritual understanding at all? That fact, however, does not mean that those so involved admit their deficiency. Indeed, no. Such people usually are adamant, even arrogant, in their claims to understanding and verity.

That the Scribes were considered the learned handlers of the Word of God—the official interpreters of the Scriptures—can be seen in Matthew 17:10. Past experience and an acceptance of a specific responsibility alone could have motivated the disciples to say what is stated in the text under consideration. As we noted earlier, even Christ recognized the office and responsibility incumbent upon the shoulders of the Scribes (Matt. 23:1–7). Though expert in the letter knowledge, did they really understand? Absolutely not! (Mark 12:18–27) Though the above was written relevant to a query from the Pharisees, please note verse 28. A Scribe was listening and then presumed to ask his own question (vv. 28–34). Christ's response is quite revealing (v. 34). He must have had good technical knowledge but lacked in spiritual understanding. Why? Please carefully analyze the following verses. If they really understood the truth, why did Christ indict them as He did? (vv. 35–40) Again, a physical grasp of Biblical statements and concepts does not equal a spiritual understanding.

Letter, physical, knowledge can be ascertained by study and research. No man in his right mind would contend with that fact. What is being herein stated is this: Physical knowledge is insufficient for salvation. Such comprehension can come only by a divine revelation. The Scribes had the technical knowledge. But, they thoroughly lacked any spiritual knowledge, comprehension, or conversion. The fruits borne were ample evidence of the lack of that knowledge which counts—a spiritual understanding. The spiritual

knowledge is that which Christ received from the Father and brought with Him at the time of His first advent. It was the understanding which He imparted to the chosen twelve apostles and later to the Apostle Paul. In every case that knowledge was the premise of hate, contempt, and volatile anger which resulted in murder of those who possessed it.

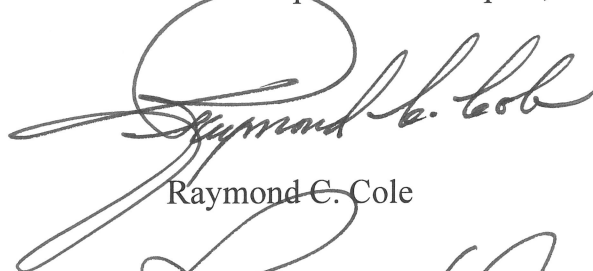
Spiritual knowledge cannot be gained by physical study (I Cor. 1:20–21). Until revealed by God it is hidden to man. Mental brilliance and capability notwithstanding. It must be revealed (Luke 24:32, Matt. 16:17, Luke 24:44–45).

How does revelation occur? God gives that message to chosen servants. It then becomes their duty to preach that way which was received. Faithfulness to that which was delivered, initially, is imperative (I Cor. 4:1–2). Preaching that way to the world is the method of broad conveyance of the revealed truth which was established by God (I Cor. 1:21, Rom. 10:8–17).

Physical, technical, knowledge of the Scriptures is humanly possible. The Scribes were expert in such matters. Real spiritual understanding can come only by divine revelation. That revelation can come only from God.

Generally the problems of today do not come from an understanding of physical knowledge versus spiritual knowledge—even that fact can be ascertained by the unconverted, by good scholastic ability. The problems stem from an understanding of whom are really called versus those who are deceived yet believe themselves to be imbued with the Holy Spirit and chosen by God for specific responsibilities. These are matters to be addressed in the future and perhaps under different circumstances. More later.

With deep love and respect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Raymond C. Cole".

Raymond C. Cole

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bryce G. Clark".

Bryce G. Clark