

# Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren,

In the last *Monthly Letter*, March 1995, addressing the issue of the purposes for the written Word of God, we exhaustively covered the concept of the Scribes and the responsibility which they bore. A first century doctrinal committee composed of scholars who in most respects would make present-day "scholars" pale into insignificance. Historic records indicate a brilliance and competence of extraordinary dimension. Yet, even with all that mental capacity, they had not come to the knowledge of the truth. In fact, because of their technical capacity, they became some of the strongest critics and adversaries who routinely confronted Jesus Christ. Those confrontations seemingly always centered around teachings—truths—which the Father had given to His Son before He was sent to this earth. Based on their physical understanding of the Old Testament, they keenly felt that they were right. And that which they felt was right they taught to the people of that day. Yet, for those called of God and instructed by Jesus Christ, those Scribes were hypocrites and perverters of the Scriptures. Further, they did not even recognize Jesus Christ as the Son of God—the Word of God living in the flesh, the fulfillment of the many prophecies which they thought they understood. Yes, even the very way of life literally personified in the flesh.

From a foundational premise, erudition does not help. On the contrary, there is considerable Biblical evidence to indicate that sophisticated learning can be an enormous impediment to spiritual understanding. Understanding of spiritual things comes by spiritual revelation only. And the concept of limited revelation is completely antagonistic to the carnal orientation of human intelligence. Human intelligence is manifested in the way men see things. Each one prides himself in his own intellectual capability—individually. Revelation requires the complete and total surrender of the self, accompanied by an attitude of receptivity for spiritual knowledge. In addition, acceptance of revelation requires the recognition (Matt. 10:40) of the one chosen of God to proclaim that way of life received and the ability to surrender to "what may appear to be the way of a man," yet, it is only the servant inspired and moved by the Holy Spirit—the very will of God. How else can we explain the circumstances surrounding the lives of men such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, the prophets, Jesus Christ himself, the twelve apostles, the Apostle Paul, and some individual, Biblically indicated, for these very last days? As Jesus said: ". . . He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me: and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (John 13:20). Also note: If the called people accept the called

and commissioned servant at any given time, they, in turn, will be accepting Christ and the Father. For these reasons it is absolutely imperative that the called recognize the difference between those who are speaking from their own hearts and minds and those who are truly speaking the inspired words of God, not that which comes from the natural carnal mind and heart. Therefore, recognition and acceptance of divine revelation is in essence the recognition of a called servant of God, and the acceptance of the message given to him by God.

Tragically, prevailing today is a common view that it is the duty of the laity to keep check on the ministry. What a perverse concept. Is that concept supposed to imply that the members are trustworthy, but the ministry is not? Indeed, there is a basis by which both ministry and laity can, and should, check themselves. That is an implicit and absolute faith in the doctrine initially delivered. In a larger sense, it is the duty of the ministry to evaluate, instruct, correct, teach, and admonish. How have the chosen of God come to such a perverse conclusion as indicated above? Is this the same spirit which dominates churches of today—rulership from the bottom up? Weigh that one carefully. It may have something to do with your future!

What, then, is the real purpose for the written Word of God? God did require that His words be recorded. The examples of this are found in the lives of Moses, many prophets, and the Apostle Paul—as also John in the writing of the book of Revelation. Since God does nothing without purpose it is inherently clear that He had some purpose in mind. To that later.

The term Scriptures means precisely what the word implies. The Words of God were written. That is, they were codified. Being written, they, to some extent, can be understood from a technical and/or surface meaning. What, then, does the proscription of II Peter 1:20 imply? ". . . no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." With sufficient education, anyone can read a written word. Based on that same education, those who read ought to be able to comprehend the physical aspects of that word. Yet, the command of God is still relevant. Considering the natural orientation of the carnal mind and the influence of experience and regional upbringing, men interpret nearly everything they hear or read. Even so, is that the depth of the proscription implied in II Peter? To understand we need to take sufficient time to thoroughly understand three words used in the text.

First, let us take note of the word used for "Scripture." The Greek is *graphe*. It is defined as document, i. e. holy Writ or its contents—Scriptures. According to a note in the *Englishman's Greek Concordance and Lexicon*, the word, as used in the New Testament, always refers to the Old Testament (Matt. 21:42, Acts 8:32). Second, let us understand the meaning of the word, "private." The Greek word is *idios*. It is defined as pertaining to self, i. e. one's own; by implication private or separate. It is used rather broadly, but with specific implication, throughout the New Testament. Third, we will consider the word "interpretation." The Greek is *epilysis*. It is taken from the word *epiluo* and is defined as explanation, i.e. application. The

word *epiluo* is defined as to solve further, i.e. figuratively to explain, decide, determine, or expound (*Strong's Concordance*).

Considering usage will help us to get a more comprehensive insight regarding the broader meaning of the referenced text.

*Scripture:* As noted above and as used in the context of New Testament instructions it always refers to the Old Testament. A statement of Jesus Christ makes it clear, although men handled the Word of God, they did not understand what they were reading. He said: ". . . Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). How do you suppose those erudite Jews felt about the inference that they did not know the Scriptures? Obviously, remember the material from the previous *Letter*, they had read and studied those Scriptures for years. See Matthew 21:42. Yet, Jesus Christ here infers that they did not know, understand, them. Long, stout, and loud claims about understanding do not equal comprehension. And from the mundane physical orientation, the claim of those who do not understand is no different from the conviction and dedication of those who have been given a true spiritual understanding. Only the truly called will, even can, know the difference.

The physically codified Word of God was written over a rather protracted period of time. However, until revealed, those very recorded Scriptures were not understood (Rom. 16:25–26). Simply and emphatically stated, understanding cannot come until a change of mind and heart occurs. Man understands physical things. He does not comprehend those things of the spirit. That, however, does not preclude the fact that under the inspiration of Satan and his cohorts wresting, corrupting, and altering the meaning of those Scriptures does not occur, even now. And more tragically, even those who once understood, but have turned to the powers and influence of natural minds, also pervert, and alter those spiritually unalterable words of God (II Pet. 2:20–21). Remembering our referenced text, it is plain that such change comes from personalized interpretations—that which leads to wresting, perverting, corrupting, and twisting Scripture. Be not deceived, however, for such convictions are stoutly defended—seen as that which is right in their own minds and hearts.

*Private:* Biblical usage of this word is quite revealing, even in its physically scripted—written—context. Noting a few places where this Greek word is used will be most helpful. Though occasionally used in the context of secrecy, it is principally used inferring personalized possession. In Matthew 24:3, Mark 6:32; 9:28; 13:3 the context clearly shows that secrecy is intended. However, the larger usage infers personal possession or orientation. Please note the following: "his own"—Matt. 9:1; 25:14, Mark 15:20, Luke 6:44, John 7:18; 10:3; 13:1; 15:19, Acts 1:7; 2:6, Rom. 8:32, Gal. 6:5, II Tim. 1:9, James 1:14. By carefully reading the preceding texts, it is most apparent that the word—as used in II Peter 1:20—proscribes any attempt to rationalize the Word of God through the power of one's own mind. The reason is clearly spelled out in verse 21. The truth of God came via the inspiration of the mind of God.

It is not possible for the mind of man—the carnal mind—to comprehend those things which come through the mind of the Spirit (I Cor. 2:11–12, 14).

*Interpretation:* In the Greek form of the word as used in II Peter 1:20 it is limited to this single usage. In a cognate form, however, the meaning is made plain. Christ used it in Mark 4:34 to convey the idea of exposition. It reads: "But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he *expounded* all things to his disciples." Taken in context of the verse, the words uttered by Christ were not understood by the human mind. He clarified—interpreted or expounded—the meaning when alone with those to whom He intended the meaning to be made clear. The word is used in one other location where its technical meaning is made obvious. As a result of accusations hurled against Paul, a townclerk made this statement. "But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it *shall be determined* in a lawful assembly" (Acts 19:39). That is, a personalized judgment, based on the mental input of a duly appointed individual, would be made. In Acts 19:39 such a judgment would be made by a man. In II Peter 1:20 such a judgment is forbidden. With respect to prophetic statements, no personalized—individualized—interpretations, expositions, or determinations are allowed.

Interpretations of prophecy are clearly proscribed. What about other parts of the Word of God? Is any form of interpretation allowed?

How did prophecy come? "*All* scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16). Not just prophecy, but all Scripture came by the inspiration of God. If interpretations of prophecy are proscribed by God, does it not seem logical that all other interpretations are likewise forbidden? Indeed! As we have already seen, but by abundant textual evidence, private interpretations are the very basis of perversions, wrestings, corruptions, and all other forms of twisting the Scriptures. Spiritual understanding is a miracle (Luke 24:44–45). Only the mind which authored the words knows what the intents and purposes are. That mind must reveal them before they can be understood. That is precisely what Peter is emphasizing in II Peter 1:20–21. Not only is it true regarding prophecy, which Peter was specifically addressing, but also all Scripture, for all Scripture came by the same impress. What is true in the one case is equally true in the other. Consistency and logic are virtues of the highest value. Only men attempt to divide and thereby pervert, alter, or, change.

Much has been said about the necessity of a required revelation before a meaningful understanding of Scripture becomes possible. There remains to be given, however, an abundance of textual evidence which will both support and anchor that concept. Though "letter" evidence is helpful, it is not the weighty proof which was accepted by all during our early spiritually formative years. We heard and we knew that we had heard the truth. The manifold doubts which surfaced, years later, notwithstanding. How so many who once believed and were so confident and assured could have lost all direction remains a mystery of the highest



magnitude. Had they truly turned from the Spirit of God to another spirit of doubt and disbelief?

Textual evidence that the Scriptures were written, read, yet not understood. Let us consider a number of them individually.

#### **Luke 4:21**

"And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." The Scripture? Isaiah 61:1-2. How many times had competent, educated, and even honorable men read that text, yet, they did not understand except in a generalized way? The historical evidence is incontrovertible. There stood the literal manifestation, fulfillment, of the text. He was not recognized, understood, or believed. Until a special mental orientation was granted, even those under the training of Christ did not comprehend.

#### **Luke 24:27**

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." The things of Christ were written centuries earlier, but they were not understood. Men could not correctly expound them. Christ could. The words of God were either known by Christ, or the Father had given Him the words He was to speak (John 12:49). On the basis of that understanding He expounded those Scriptures to His trainees. Obviously, until expounded by Christ, the meaning of those Scriptures was not known. With all the powers of human mind, the spiritual intent of those things written could not be known or understood.

Another interesting facet of this concept is this. What was revealed by the expositions given by Christ? Those things which pertained to Him personally. What about the many other aspects of the written Word of God—that which is called the Old Testament? No indication that they were revealed at that time. Interestingly, God chooses the individuals whom He elects to reveal specific knowledge; He determines the times and circumstances under which He will reveal foreordained knowledge; and He chooses the conditions under which He will reveal specific knowledge. To set the record straight, it is absolutely necessary that human beings understand that what is occurring here on this earth is the Work of God. Men would do well to remember that what God purposes to do He can do by himself. He has no need for their meddling. If and when He wants to use any man He is perfectly capable of calling and commissioning that man. All except those truly called and sent by God have exercised arrogance of mind and thereby manifest total presumption. Understanding that purpose is by a revelation of God only—and to those only whom He elects to reveal it. How greatly in opposition to the concept of men who think that they make their own determinations.

## Luke 24:32

"And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" Verbally known before by these men, yet they were left without understanding. At that very moment, Jesus opened the minds of these concerned individuals, allowing them to understand that which they had previously read. Understanding the word "opened" as employed in this verse is extremely illuminating. The Greek word is *dianoigo*. It means to open thoroughly, literally (as a first born); figuratively to expound: Open (*Strong's Concordance*). Let us take a carefully considered review of its Biblical usage. *Dianoigo* is compounded of two distinct Greek words. The *dia* is a prefix. It is a primitive preposition denoting the channel of an act. The basic component of the word is *anoigo*, meaning to open, open up, literally and figuratively in various applications. Now let us consider its Biblical usage.

Used in a physical circumstance by Christ, the spiritual significance becomes quite instructive. In Mark 7:34 and 35, as used, the word quite plainly means to unstop, to open that which had been closed. The texts read: "And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, *Ephphatha*, that is, *Be opened*. And straightway his ears *were opened*, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain." With regard to childbirth, the meaning becomes even more revealing. In Luke 2:23 the word is used in this context. It reads, "(As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male *that openeth* the womb shall be called holy to the Lord)." Here the meaning is absolute. It is the initiation of a woman's childbearing capability. There may be other children to follow. There, however, must always be a first. That first one opens that which had been previously closed.

Now let us see a few examples of a spiritual, or philosophical, application of this principle. In Luke 24:31–32, 45 we read: "And their *eyes were opened*, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he *opened* to us the SCRIPTURES? Then *opened* he their UNDERSTANDING, that they might understand the scriptures . . ." Scriptures had been written many generations earlier. The disciples had spent much time with Christ—a perfect Teacher. Yet, until that moment of the miracle, they did not, indeed, could not understand that which was written.

Now for a couple of texts to show what happened following the time of Christ. In the days of the apostles, a special miraculous revelation was still required. In Acts 16:14 we read: "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord *opened*, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." How does God effect that revealing, opening? Luke explains in Acts 17:3, "*Opening* and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ."

Another compounded Greek word will aid in our understanding of this vital principle. It is the Greek word, *dianoia*. It, too, is composed of the preposition *dia* with the addition of *noia*, which comes from the Greek *nous*. *Nous* in Greek means the intellect, i.e. the mind (divine or human; in thought, feeling, or will), by implication, meaning: mind or understanding (*Strong's Concordance*). Here, it will be most instructive to see how the word is used Biblically.

1. It is used to denote rationalizations of the natural, carnal, mind of all men. Luke 1:51 "He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the *imagination* of their hearts." Ephesians 2:3 reads: "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the *desires* of the flesh and of the *mind*; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

2. It is used to denote a change from the natural mind—rationalizations which are considered to be right by all men. Paul addresses this matter in Ephesians 1:18, "The eyes of your *understanding* being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints . . ." The Apostle Paul, also, instructs the Colossians. He says: "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your *mind* by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled" (Col. 1:21). Further, the Apostle John said, in I John 5:20 "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an *understanding*, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

3. How that mental orientation is effected. It is by the purpose and power of the Almighty God. Twice in the book of Hebrews we are told how this change is effectuated. In Hebrews 8:10, we read: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their *mind*, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people . . ." Also, Hebrews 10:16, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their *minds* will I write them . . ." God must miraculously open the mind of understanding. Then He, by His own power, will write His very laws into the minds and hearts of those chosen. Considering all this, let us be candid in our hearts. How is it possible for human beings to effect their own call and then give spiritual direction to their own lives? Such simply is not possible.

There is a major problem involved in all this. That is a factor which will be addressed in the appropriate time. At the moment, let us emphasize the necessity of keeping the question in mind.

4. Natural minds are natural minds. Only God can change the orientation. With a changed mental perspective, it now becomes possible for God to write His laws and ways into the hearts and minds of the called. However, we are not home free, yet. We need to ask

ourselves, once called and having become the recipients of the operative power of God working within us, is it possible to lose that orientation? In such a case the mind not only returning to a carnal state, but even more tragically, being darkened beyond the possibility of enlightenment again? Note Ephesians 4:18, "Having the *understanding* darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart . . ." What was once light can turn to darkness—and how dark that darkness can become. Tragically, such a condition is a manifestation of the fateful and unalterable state of one who does not value the light of truth once it is delivered.

5. How has God instructed us to keep, cherish, and nourish our conviction—the belief in that way of life which was revealed to us? Peter answers that question. We read, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your *mind*, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ . . ." Once that mind is opened God requires that we safeguard it with faith and conviction. If we begin to doubt, the results are catastrophic.

From the above material we can come to no other conclusion except the following. Man in his natural mind cannot know nor understand God and the ways of life—the truth. To understand requires a miracle—a miraculous change of mind. Once that change has occurred, it is absolutely devastating to lose faith and conviction.

Men have the capacity of mind. They can read and understand the written word. Even so, it is most obvious that the natural mind cannot comprehend those things which are spiritual. For these reasons, when men of natural mind attempt to comprehend the Word of God, the results will always be convictions based on personal interpretations. Personal study will not bring one to the truth of God. That truth can come only by a revelation and only to those whom God has called. Once called and the truth understood faithfulness to that revealed way is imperative.

### **Luke 24:44**

"And he said unto them, 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." Written, indeed. The Words of God had been written for centuries. Did the people understand them? No! If such an understanding existed, why was it necessary for Christ to open the understanding of the disciples before they could comprehend? Reading the Bible and coming to a conclusion on the basis of what a man may think does not constitute a spiritual understanding. That is what we are to expect when men of natural minds attempt to interpret the Bible. And such interpretations are absolutely forbidden. Truth comes only by revelation—a revelation to a chosen servant whom the people must hear, respect, and honor in faithful obedience.

Until instructed by Christ, to be based on acceptance and faith, even the disciples did not understand what the Scriptures inherently revealed (John 20:9). Perhaps we are beginning to understand just how hard it is to believe short of a miracle—a miracle which must occur in the natural mind. And on the basis of the recorded history of the training of the disciples—future apostles—it should have become quite apparent how quickly and easily the called and chosen servant can lose that miraculous orientation, returning to the doubtful ways of men. Within this singular feature of man's mental orientation will be found the vital ingredient necessary for faith and conviction to sustain the called until the return of Jesus Christ. How many will there be? According to those revealed Scriptures, manifestations of self-justifications and rigid acceptance and belief in those concepts generated from natural minds will predominantly exist in these last days. Sobering and traumatic circumstances lie just ahead of us all. In this caldron of emotional chaos (I Cor. 11:19) those approved will be made manifest. *Sticktoitiveness*, tenacity, will be the name of the game. From a historical perspective, a trait not long-enduring among men. Spiritually, it is called faith. Israel lacked it; and surprisingly it will be, according to the Bible, in short supply even among those once called and enlightened by the power of God in these troubling last days. Too, man will find it easy to accommodate the powers that be in the world as well as the dictates of the natural, carnal, mind and flesh.

There are other texts to be addressed in this area of the subject under consideration. For those we must wait for a future issue of the *Letter*. Once again the constraints of page limits forbid further analysis for the present. There is much yet to come. Please be patient. The requirement is not how fast we can cover a subject; rather how comprehensively and authoritatively material is presented. It is our purpose to see that you are equipped with that material which will enable you to resist the many and varied temptations which will most assuredly come your way from time to time.

Serving you is always a pleasure. And again we commend you into the love and divine protection of the Almighty and benevolent Father.

With profound love and respect,



Raymond C. Cole



Bryce G. Clark