

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

Peace and quiet seem to reign for the present. Since there exists no necessity of addressing some imperative subject for the month of September, opportunity will be seized once again to continue coverage of "Why the Written Word of God?"

Since human minds are not to be trusted, every attempt has been made to shatter private sanctuaries to which human minds flee when confronted with "inexplicable" material. For that reason considerable textual substance has been advanced to make understandable every aspect of the subject. With patience and hope the real issue inherent in the subject will be presented. Before presenting the positives, the need to eliminate all negatives is imperative. The issue is somewhat akin to a recalcitrant's attempt to avoid the necessity of giving precise explanations of a specific text which appears embarrassing. He can emphatically tell you what he does not believe. But, when pressed, he is incapable of giving a specific and logical positive explanation. With human beings, destruction, of buildings or concepts, is so much more "pleasurable" and "satisfying" than construction. Destruction requires so little intelligence. Construction demands purpose, organization, ability, thought, and a whole host of other talents. It is the purpose of the author to destroy all the available negatives before explaining the incontrovertible evidence which will make clear the positives—the real God-intended purposes for the writing and preservation of the Holy Word, the Bible. Regarding the subject under consideration, we have yet to hear, or read, of one single cogent objection. However, the array of humanly devised objections—conceptual flak—is ponderous. Even though we wholeheartedly believe in divine revelation, we are not adverse to discussing any technicality involved in the subject with those who sincerely and rightly hunger for the truth. Is it because they know their premise might prove to be embarrassing?

Synopsis

In the May 1995 issue of this letter we presented evidence that possessing the *written* word and using it as a presumed guide in the conduct of our lives did not constitute a genuine and true understanding. The people saw the physical manifestation of that Word in their very presence. They did not recognize Him. Scriptures related to His human existence had long existed, yet even the chosen did not understand them. In the time, place, manner, and to those whom He willed, the understanding was given. It was a miracle. Even the possibility of comprehension was a miracle. That capability was given in the time chosen by Christ.

In order that all available material be given, textual substantiation of the above concept will now be continued. We do not want to be criticized, as once occurred on a different subject, by failing to present all the evidence. In the above case one text had been left out of the dozens which are Biblically recorded. What extremes people will pursue to avoid the central issue! In this context we will try to present everything which seems to be relative to the subject under consideration.

Now let us add to the corps of material which will make the subject intelligible and comprehensible. We do not want to leave anything out.

John 20:9

It reads, "For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead." Does this text imply that the disciples were amazed to find such a concept existed in the sacred Scriptures? Of course not! Had they technically heard nothing that Christ had spoken to them? From the beginning of His ministry He had inferred such an event would transpire. And, then, in the final days, weeks, and even months of His life, Christ had begun to emphasize that event. No doubt about it. The disciples knew what Christ had said; they even feared the reality of it.

What is said is this. They did not understand that which was written. Interestingly the *Living Bible* reads, verses 8 and 9, "Then I went in too, and saw, and believed [that he had risen]—for until then we hadn't realized that the Scriptures said he would come to life again!" The disciples had heard. They just did not comprehend.

Yes, indeed, revelation of meaning, purpose, is sometimes amazing and shocking at the time of such insight. Any true servant of God is aware of such enlightenment. A text read hundreds of times, now, in an amazing manner comes alive. The truly chosen of God have many times experienced this same emotion, enlightenment. Such comprehension was

not a realization that a hidden text had come to light; on the contrary, it was a grasp of the intent and purpose which had been divinely hidden from time immemorial.

Acts 18:24-28

"And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly, And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ."

Here is a man who had learned limited truth through the preaching of John the Baptist. He was highly motivated. An eloquent speaker and very knowledgeable. But, for whatever reasons, He was unaware of the increase of knowledge which had come through the preaching of Jesus Christ. With all of his spiritual orientation and irrefutable knowledge of specific Scriptures, he had not come to an understanding of that which was necessary to proclaim the way of God. God did not give him that knowledge through his own studies of the Scriptures. He used the twin servants of Aquila and Priscilla. They instructed him in the more perfect way of God.

How had Aquila and his wife come to a knowledge of that "more perfect way"? They had been instructed by the Apostle Paul, that servant to whom God had revealed His way of life (Acts 18:1-23). Compare Galatians 1:6-17. From Paul's personal study of accepted Scriptures he was pursuing the religion of a particular sect of the Jews. In God's own time He called Paul and revealed the truth of the Scriptures which he had previously thought he understood. What a far different orientation is that which Paul explains than that which is commonly believed by any and all who seem to feel that they have come to a knowledge of the truth of God through their own personal study of the Bible. That knowledge to which one comes by his own study is simply the knowledge, way, which seems right to that individual. It is not a revelation from the mind of God.

Though called to be a mighty and effective servant of God, Apollos had to be instructed, by specially chosen servants, in that perfect way of life before he could proclaim that truth. He did not arrive at an understanding from his own personalized study. His knowledge came by that which he first learned through the teaching of John the Baptist and grew into that more perfect way he acquired through the instruction of Aquila and Priscilla.

Apollos had the written Word of God but a true understanding did not come until he was miraculously taught by "ordained" servants of God. What would have happened if Apollos had adamantly adhered to his own convictions—even those he had learned from John the Baptist? He would have been lacking in many major areas. Yet, that which he first learned was foundational to that which he was to learn subsequently. Growth is essential. It always comes from the chosen of God. Yet, it never violates that which was first given. Was John the Baptist teaching error? Of course not! What he taught lead inexorably to that which was taught by Christ. John's message had been given to him. The message Christ taught had been given to Him. Both were by divine revelation. Then miraculously those who heard the messages delivered responded by a comparable revelation. It is simply the way God performs His work.

Next let us understand a clarification given by the Apostle Paul when writing to the called in Rome. Though we have explained the following text previously, it should be mentioned here.

Romans 16:25–26

"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, made known to all nations for the obedience of the faith."

Up to the time of Jesus Christ and the apostles the gospel was kept secret—a mystery, unknown. By special revelation it was made comprehensible in the time of Jesus Christ and the apostles who followed Him. However, those Scriptures—the source of the gospel—were written many, many years before that time. Yes, written, but not known, not understood. By divine revelation the mysterious Scriptures were made known to Paul. They formed the gospel which he taught. That which he was commanded to teach the people.

God called His chosen servants. He revealed the mysterious meaning of the previously hidden Scriptures. Then, the chosen of God were commanded to proclaim that gospel which was delivered to them. And those appointed of God heard the message proclaimed by the ministry approved and commissioned. Again, simply stated, it is the way God performs His work here on earth. There is no other. God's Word is written. We call it the Holy Bible. It may be read by anyone fortunate enough to possess a copy. But, it will never be understood until the meaning is revealed by God. And, that revelation will always come through a chosen servant—minister—of God. Why do human beings try to compel God to act in accord with that which seems acceptable to themselves? Is it defiance and rebellion

on the part of individuals, that which keeps them from accepting the simple and straightforward way of God? Seemingly men cannot accept the way of revelation as an introduction to the truth of God. Then, and equally troubling, those who once accepted the way of revelation often have a problem of remaining faithful to that concept. In either case, mortals desire to massage and rework the revealed truths of God on the basis of their own mental orientation.

What needs to be understood is this: *The written Scriptures are never in opposition to revelation.* Indeed, no. The problem is with the understanding, man's understanding. Most human beings have the capacity to read. And in their own minds they also have the ability to understand what is written. That mental outlook is that of one who is thoroughly carnal in attitude. The converted mind is one which recognizes its inabilities, seeking always to be taught and instructed in the way of righteousness. It is one which has no confidence in its own prowess and intellectual capability. It is one which has come to know who is a called and chosen servant of God—one who has the words of life. When we come to the time of evaluation of the real purpose for the written Word of God, the Bible, it will become clear that revelation is the principle of unlocking the meaning of that which is written. For the first time, in all probability, that which was often read will become plain, inspirational, understandable. And if we can take the past history of man, as recorded in that written Word, the revelation of the Scriptures will be accompanied by a revelation of the man to whom God gave a duty, commission, of proclaiming that way of life. Is there any question about the statement of the Apostle Paul to the Romans? Was there ever any question about the person of Christ himself? What about that which the Twelve Apostles taught? Was not the acceptance of those apostles uniquely related to the understanding of the Scriptures? Is not the same true of every prophet, regardless of the time in which he prophesied? What about Noah? Was it possible to accept the true message of Noah's time without accepting Noah as the servant of God? Take a good look at every such situation recorded in the Word of God. Is there one where the truth was understood and practiced without the acceptance of the commissioned servant of God? On the other hand, is there a single record of one who turned to the self, privately studying the Holy Word, and who came to a complete and total knowledge of that which is essential for salvation? (Please do not confuse the call of a lay-member with the call of a specially chosen servant, a minister.) In all cases God has chosen individuals to whom He has given the message and then commissioned (sent) them to proclaim that way of life delivered. Those individuals who hear the voice of the messenger and are convicted will respond. They will surrender their minds, seeking only to have the mind of Christ dominant within themselves. There are those who read and were confused until their comprehension was correctly established by one chosen of God.

To the Romans the Apostle Paul emphatically stated that the real knowledge of the written Word of God was hidden. That the revelation of the true meaning was given to him at an appointed time, for purpose. And that what was given to him is called the gospel.

Paul was called and commissioned to preach that gospel. The people would hear the message as a result of the preaching of Paul. Does it make sense to believe that once the people heard the truth by the preaching of Paul they were now in a position to evaluate the message which they were being taught and even the messenger himself? How did they know that what Paul was preaching was indeed the truth except by the initial heartfelt response which they experienced? They heard and they believed. Now, for the first time those who had so received and continued to love that truth which they had received were in a position to evaluate any tampering with and changing of that revealed word. Any other orientation is simply a denial of revelation, a return to carnal mental arrogance, and, worst of all, the rejection of the concept of faith.

To the Romans Paul espoused the concept of revelation. To those who had eyes to read and ears by which they heard, they had no doubts about the validity of divine revelation. The Romans were told by a servant of God. Did such circumstances insure continuity of belief and faith? Of course, it did not! Consider what history reveals. What about others who had heard and accepted the truths of God as delivered by the Apostle Paul? Since the problem is carnality, should we not expect the same difficulty in other areas of the world and with different peoples? What about Asia Minor?

Galatians 4:28-31

"Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."

How did Paul come to the above conclusion? Is that which is written no more than the guesses of Paul? Reading the Old Testament Scriptures referenced in no way helps the carnal mind to comprehend the spiritual content. The only way we understand today is in the fact, by faith, we accept the Bible as the written Word of God, that Paul was indeed inspired of God, and that the message he conveyed is truly that which God revealed to him. There is no way the unaided mind of man could have comprehended the real meaning of the Genesis story. That meaning and purpose were locked—hidden mysteriously—in the text itself. Without a revelation the meaning would have remained unknown. Since there is no area, other texts or stories, in the Bible which earlier conveyed the meaning Paul emphatically stated, we can only conclude that the mystery remained hidden until the very time of Christ, the Twelve Apostles, and the Apostle Paul himself—the appointed day of revelation. Yet, we are sure there were many, over the centuries, who presumed they understood the significance and purpose of that Genesis story. What they did not know, they

simply did not know. Further, without faith and confidence in the operation and purpose of God, as well as an acceptance of Paul as a servant of God, that which was revealed would not have been accepted. Revelation requires faith. Lots of it! And the acceptance of the revelation necessitates the acceptance of the one through whom the message is revealed. That concept is just as true today as it was in historical times.

Why did a so-called "scientific mind" develop? Because the carnal mind cannot live by that which requires faith. Such a mind accepts (presumably) only that which can be demonstrated, proven by controlled experimentation, or manifested and observed tangibly. However, that which is essential for salvation comes by faith—that which is not seen or observed. In no area of life is this principle more imperative than in the acceptance of the Word of God and the messenger himself. Why do you accept the quotes of Christ, the prophets, the apostles? Only because you, by some element of faith, accept the commissioned servant himself? If that is not true, then the most that can be said for you is that you are walking in the footsteps of a mere man. Could that man be you? Following a presumed revelation which has come only from the recesses of your own carnal minds? To genuinely accept the Bible and its varied contents is an act of faith. It is proven by your acceptance of the called servants of God. As Christ said: ". . . Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:46-47) Wherever the truth is, you will find a people who believe it because they have accepted the messenger. Conversely, if the messenger is not to be accepted then neither is the message. Therefore, the people of God have accepted both the message and the messenger. They know the message and that one through which it is proclaimed. If the messenger fails to remain faithful to that way of life which they heard and received by faith, they will refuse to depart and thereby walk in the ways of error.

Can you accept Paul's interpretation of Scripture—that which was written several hundreds of years prior to his time? If so, could you tell us why? Does your answer lie in the fact that you firmly believe Paul was a true and faithful servant of God? But, did he not have trouble being accepted in his own day, especially after a few years of his teaching and attendant corrections administered for the benefit of the people? Interestingly, many of the things which were revealed to Paul became a very part of the written Scriptures—the very Bible which we accept as the revealed Word of God.

In essence we are confronted with this requirement of faith. Those who receive the true servants of God are the ones who have accepted—received—Christ (Matt. 10:40). And, in turn, have accepted the Father. The equation cannot be reversed. Your way to a knowledge of Christ and the Father is in the acceptance of the called and commissioned servants of Christ. We heard a servant in these last days. But, for the same reasons experienced by Christ, the Twelve Apostles, and the Apostle Paul himself, the servant of God in these last days has not been really accepted. Most will accept him if they have a right to

moderate, change, or in some other way alter that doctrine which was delivered to him. Christ could not change it. The apostles could not change it. It must not be changed in our day either. As was true in the time of the apostles, that which was received in these last days was a revelation of that which has for centuries been written—that which is called the Scriptures. Do you have faith in that revelation? Few, indeed, have ever been able to maintain such faith and conviction.

Unbelievably, the labor and care of oxen illustrate the economic responsibility borne by the church toward the called and chosen servants of God. For the final text in this part of the series of letters addressing the purposes for the written Word of God, allow us to make reference to I Timothy 5:17-18.

I Timothy 5:17-18

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward."

As mentioned above, how did the Apostle Paul know that those texts (referenced) had an underlying meaning—a spiritual meaning? Did he just guess? If not, what was the source of his inspiration? If it came from God, it continues to be interesting that so many of those he was called to serve failed to get the message or to accept his instruction—not only in the case of the texts above, but also in many, many other areas. It ought to be abundantly clear that the acceptance of his message was predicated first on the acceptance of him as a legitimate servant of God. When he was accepted, the message was accepted. When the people were distressed with Paul, probably due to things which he taught, his message was rejected. Did the truth of that which he taught change when the people rejected what he said? Yet, brethren, we see this same pattern manifested time and time again today. Always, of course, based on the feelings of an individual, or of individuals. Deception will not allow them to be honest. Of course, they will invariably justify themselves on the basis of some perceived injustice or injury. What happens to us individually, or collectively, has absolutely nothing to do with the validity of truth. Such things are personal problems—problems which we are required to correct in our own lives. Taken to illogical ends, personalization could lead us to islands of individualization—every man becoming a law unto himself. Are not mental dislocations leading us to that end, and very rapidly? It is the same state of affairs which became dominant in ancient Israel. A condition strongly denounced by God. The end result of a strong emphasis on the "duty" to personally study God's Word for the purpose of determining what is right—right in the view of that individual mind. The miracle of conversion is seen in the philosophical concept of many becoming one. It should be most obvious that such oneness does not come from any reliance upon that one mind which we

carnally possess. It must come from the gift of a single mind. A subject to be covered in another issue of this letter.

In summary for this letter, let us state emphatically: We can find no place, in the pages of the Bible, an acceptable justification for the belief that one can come to a true spiritual knowledge of the truth through personalized study of the sacred Scriptures. On the contrary, there is a huge volume of evidence that understanding requires a special miracle—the opening of one's mind and heart to the meaning of that which is written. It was required in the days of Jesus Christ. The same requirement existed in the days of all the apostles. Do you suppose that the conditions and requirements are any different in these last days—the days in which we live? Since God is an unchanging God—His ways are the same always—we prefer to believe that the same orientation is required in our time. Yes, a lot more than merely a belief. We know that an understanding of the Scriptures can come only by a divine revelation. And that understanding came by a divine revelation, and now corroborated—literally confirmed—by the written Word itself.

So that you can see the subject in perspective, let us give a brief synopsis of what has been covered regarding this subject; then, a short outline of what needs yet exist. To better comprehend the scope and magnitude of a subject it sometimes is necessary to see it from the beginning all the way to the end. A long subject requires this orientation much more than a short concept.

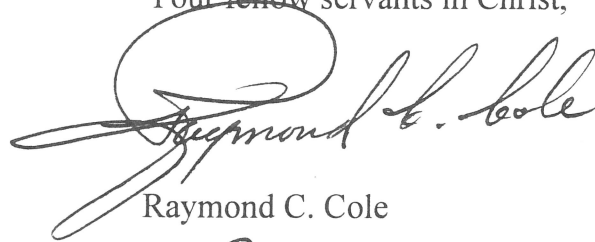
First, we addressed the matter of the human mind and the need for a divine revelation. Included was the history of the lives of the Patriarchs, the Prophets, Christ, and the apostles. Next, we covered the authoritative nature of the Scriptures. That, in reality, they are the very Words of God. This was followed by an issue in which we discussed what man, throughout history, has done to those Scriptures. And the "whys" of man's mishandling the sacred Scriptures. In May 1994, the subject of the apostasies was covered. In July 1994, the issue of perversion, corruption, interpretation, wresting, and tradition was addressed. Next, if personalized study could produce an acceptable knowledge of the truth, why did Christ condemn a whole school of individuals who in all probability were the most learned technically of all time—the Scribes? Finally, in this issue as well as the last one, the philosophical concepts of carnal study and divine revelation were addressed.

There are a few other imperative concepts which yet need our attention. So that you can see the overall subject in context, let us mention a few of those needing to be addressed. 1) Who alone really understands the truth? 2) How do the people come to know and understand those Scriptures which were locked up in mystery from the foundation of the world? 3) What is the responsibility of the ministry and the laity today? 4) Texts used to justify the concept and belief that personalized study will bring one to a knowledge of the truth. 5) Other.

We have spent considerable time, in this issue, plumbing the depth of the perverted concept of "personalized study." We do not want to be misunderstood. There are legitimate reasons for individual study. Why are the real reasons for the duty of individual study ignored, rejected, or in some way perverted; whereas, the corrupted reasons are pursued with religious intensity? Could it be a combination of the natural tendency of the carnal mind coupled with a little help from another unseen source? You be the judge.

Until next time, may we once again convey all our love and respect to you? You are precious in the sight of God and to those who truly love and respect the truth of God.

Your fellow servants in Christ,

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

Raymond C. Cole

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bryce G. Clark". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'B'.

Bryce G. Clark