

Church of God, The Eternal

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The Two Facets of Divine Revelation—Part IV What Is Man?

August 1980

Dear Brethren:

Feast of Tabernacles fever is mounting. Most of the brethren are becoming quite anxious and excited. Now is the time for all to pray for God's special protection, intervention, and blessings for the Feast. Further, due to economic instability, it is absolutely imperative that we pray for one another and for special help, by whatever means, so that all (or at least the majority) can attend this year.

One cannot fail to see the host of woes which humankind has experienced in the last year. Indications are that conditions will continue to deteriorate—even accelerating as time passes. In days such as these, the people of God must learn what it is to have real faith and trust in God. There is no other sure foundation. We cannot trust society. We cannot trust the government. We cannot even trust our own personal ability. Those deficient in faith will find the going in the months ahead frustrating, troubling, and unsure. But those who really trust and believe God will take in stride the events, conditions, and circumstances. They know they cannot change matters. They also know God has foretold these conditions. The converted know they must accept these circumstances, entrusting their lives and futures into the hands of God. What a confidence and hope!

If we trust God, He will give us the best Feast we can possibly anticipate. Observing the Feast is an act of obedience to God. Obedience results in many great blessings. We are trying, to the best of our ability, to arrange for as many as possible to be present and have that opportunity this year. God will back up those who do their best and place total confidence in Him.

We surely hope to see all of you at the Feast this year. Let us all begin to pray earnestly for others—for safety, peace, and God's mighty intervention. He hears the prayers of the faithful.

For this month, we will return to the series of letters dealing with physical and spiritual knowledge (the two facets of divine revelation). This time the subtopic is, "What Is Man?"

Previously we have understood the reality of *two types* of knowledge. There is physical knowledge and there is spiritual knowledge. The comprehension of one does not necessarily mean a comprehension of the other.

Further, we have made it plain that the Truth of God is spiritual knowledge. It is hidden from the understanding of the natural man. Until it is revealed, natural man cannot grasp or understand. He does not sense his deficiency. He is not aware of any inherent limitations. However, those limitations are very real and will be evident to each human being at God's appointed time.

Next we learned that God's Word is Truth. That fact, coupled with the knowledge that Truth is spiritual and man is physical, devoid of spiritual awareness, makes it abundantly clear that man of himself cannot understand the Word of God—*The Holy Bible*.

Now that we have introduced man into the subject, let us come to understand thoroughly who and what he *is*! And to understand the positive aspects of man and his station and purpose in life, it is equally important to understand what he is not.

What Is Man?

Ancient men of renown have been troubled with this thought. Man is born, labors for ephemeral purposes, and then dies. He is here so short a span of time. He achieves so little of what he conceives (dreams or plans). Does the possession of such mental capacity indicate some purpose beyond this momentary and transitory, mundane existence?

Indeed it does. But we cannot understand "tomorrow" until we understand and properly use "today." We live *now*! The usage of time allotted—the NOW—has much to do with the purpose of tomorrow. Therefore, let us grasp the present!

King David of Israel was a sincere, honest, and contemplative ruler. He wondered about his own existence, along with that of others who lived both before and after his time. Under inspiration of God he wrote: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? . . ." (Psalm 8:4). "Why should the exalted God of the universe be concerned with lowly man?" he reasoned. Why should God assist him? Why should God evidence a primary purpose in man?

David continued: "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels . . ." (verse 5). His station is certainly not that of the God plane, and he is not even on the same level with angels. Thus, David was inspired to write that man was created in a station just a little lower than that of the angels.

Even though created at a lower station, has he been endowed with some awesome purpose? Yes indeed! For David again wrote: ". . . and hast crowned him [man] with glory and honour" (last part of Ps. 8:5).

David knew that beyond this mundane existence was some great, significant purpose for man. An understanding of that purpose will be examined later.

What are man's *present* purposes? David answers: "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet" (Ps. 8:6).

Unlike animals (also created by God), man was given capacity to design, build, and use his creations. He can construct his own society and the environment in which he lives. In that respect, he shares certain abilities with God, even though his present potential is vastly inferior to that possessed by God.

There are problem areas. Men refuse to recognize these innate weaknesses. Because of this refusal, mankind has constructed ways of existence—patterns of life—which are antithetical to man's real, God-intended purpose.

It is in this area of conflict (between his natural self and the God-given purpose) that character is constructed. In this area, either the will of God or the lustful appetites of flesh are manifested—on a day-by-day basis.

To understand this conflict—the nature of man as opposed to his God-given purpose—we need to echo the question of David: What is man, that God should be mindful of him?

Man Is Earthbound

Man is the *creation* of God. God is his *Maker*. At an appointed time in the midst of eternity (which only God understands), God designed a vast, far-flung universe of multiple galaxies. Among these was the galaxy in which He created the planet Earth (Isa. 45:12). He made the planet habitable for man (same verse). As far as we know, from both divine revelation and the limited knowledge of science, this planet is the only one—among all the

many orbiting bodies—on which fleshly life exists. Man is *earthbound*. He cannot survive without the atmospheric conditions which surround Earth. That became more tangibly evident to the astronauts who braved space, some even spending time on the moon. Those who left the atmosphere of this earth were required to take with them life-sustaining substances—food, air, etc.

Man is "of the earth, earthy," said the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 15:47). He is made of the very substances which are found on this planet Earth. In order to sustain his physical existence, he *must* daily ingest the same ingredients of which he is composed.

In every way, he is absolutely limited to the earth. He is made of the dust of the ground—the soil of the earth. His fancies of existing elsewhere in this universe are just that—fancies.

Man is of this earth, there is no doubt! But he does have a purpose which far transcends his limited physical existence.

Man Is in the Image and Shape of God

Though of dust, man was created in God's shape and likeness. God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . ." (Gen. 1:26). And so He did. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27). Both male and female are in the image of God.

The Bible stresses the *fact* of creation—creation by God and in His image. We read:

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam [man], in the day when they were created (Gen. 5:1–2).

Again inspired to emphasize the fact of creation, Moses said: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Gen. 9:6).

God is man's Maker. He made him of the dust of the ground—of the basest of all physical substances. Man possesses virtually no significant intrinsic worth. Yet, God created him in His own image and likeness. There is an awesome purpose for this creation in His likeness.

What Is the Composition of Man?

Man exists by chemical processes. If those orderly processes of chemistry are interrupted, death results! As his Creator, God made him subject to death.

Moses knew and understood this truth. He wrote: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). By the process of chemical interaction between air breathed and food eaten (food grown on the same soil from which we are taken), we revitalize our bodies daily. Failure to satisfy air or food requirements will result in death. Breath is a constant demand. Food intake can be interrupted for limited periods of time only. Man is a chemical entity. By the process of breathing, he becomes—not possesses—a living (chemically activated) body. He is a living *nephesh* (body). Death is the cessation of those chemical processes by which life is produced.

By inspiration, Moses stressed man's dependency upon the vital elements of life. He said: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust *thou* [the conscious man himself] art, and unto dust shalt thou [the conscious man] return" (Gen. 3:19). Producing food and eating are essential to sustaining life. But the sustaining of life is not ageless. For, the physical tendency is toward degeneration. In process of time, physical man will die.

Abraham recognized this absolute truth. He said: "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). That is, he (Abraham) was dust and ashes. The conscious, living body—Abraham—was only an activated, chemical existence.

Job understood what he was. He wrote: "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me. Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the day; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?" (Job 10:8–9.) Again: ". . . them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust . . . ?" (Job 4:19).

Job's friend Elihu understood. He said: ". . . I also am formed out of the clay" (Job 33:6).

Isaiah, by the same Spirit which motivated the servants of God mentioned above, knew this vital truth. He wrote: "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall *the clay* say to *him* [God] that fashioneth it, What makest thou? . . ." (Isa. 45:9). The *clay*—not something resident within the clay—was speaking. Man *is* dust, said God. He has *NO* life inherent within himself.

He *is* a chemical body—existing by the natural functions of biochemistry. A natural entity, but one which has a potential vastly superior to *all* the animal creation.

Isaiah stressed the above point. He wrote: "But now, O Lord, thou art our father; *we* [each man himself—not a shell in which the human personality lives] are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand" (Isa. 64:8).

Man is clay—of the dust of the earth. God is working with that clay—molding and fashioning it with His hands according to His will and purpose.

Paul knew and understood what man is. He said to the Corinthian church: "The first man [Adam—from whom all of us have come] is of the earth [dust, clay], earthy . . ." (1 Cor. 15:47).

Solomon, also, wrote of man's natural state: ". . . that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even *one* thing befalleth them: *as the one dieth*, so dieth the other; yea, they have all *one* breath [the breath of life—existence—is the same in both man and animal]; so that a *man hath no preeminence above a beast*: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; *all are of the dust*, and all turn to dust again" (Eccl. 3:19–20).

Both man and beast are created of the dust of the earth. God breathed the breath of life into them both. They are organic bodies, functioning by the natural laws of chemistry. When they die, their bodies return to the dust from which God took them.

What is man? For the present, he is clay. He is subject to death all the days of his physical existence. When the inevitable day of death comes, he will return to the clay from which he was created.

Dust or clay does not breathe. It does not live. Though created of dust, man was also made something else! What is he?

Man Is Flesh

Early in human history, men grew evil, corrupt, perverse. Why? Note Genesis 6:3: ". . . the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with *man*, for that *he* also *is flesh* [margin: 'in their going astray they are flesh'] . . ."

Jesus said: "That which is born of the flesh *is flesh* . . ." (John 3:6). By contrast, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. At the present, in his natural state, man is flesh—not spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 15:39, the Apostle Paul describes man's estate. He says: "All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds." There is one thing in common. They all are of flesh. And flesh is a creation of clay or dust. Though one substance, flesh, there are *kinds* of flesh. The flesh of men is not the same as the flesh of fowl, fish, or animals. Each possesses a different type of flesh.

God has always been cognizant of His physical creation. He is aware of man. At times God has intervened aggressively in the affairs of man. At such times He has always had to remember that man in the flesh is weak, having little power in life. Man is greatly limited.

The psalmist David wrote of God's relationship with man. When dealing with man's rebellion and wickedness, ". . . he [God] remembered that they *were* but *flesh* . . ." (Ps. 78:39). David elaborated: ". . . he [God] knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14).

In anticipation of man's ultimate purpose—the purpose for which God created him—his *direct* Maker (Christ) had to be made flesh, of the same substances and inherent weakness which man possesses. Paul wrote to the Hebrews (Jews in Jerusalem): "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [Christ] also *himself* likewise *took part of the same* . . ." (Heb. 2:14).

Note what Christ Himself said: "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39). Though now resurrected, Jesus manifested Himself in the only substance man could see, handle, and comprehend.

For approximately 33 years, Jesus lived in the flesh. He came to fulfill an awesome purpose—one which directly affects His relationship with man. When writing to Timothy, Paul referred to this purpose. He said: ". . . without controversy great is *the mystery of godliness*: God [Christ] was manifest in the flesh . . ." (1 Tim. 3:16).

Why was He manifested in the flesh? Why was He subjected to all the weaknesses inherent in man? We shall understand this later.

Man was created of the dust of the earth. He was made flesh. And flesh is intrinsically weak and evil. If he is to be afforded any hope for the future, some mysterious change must transpire. In that necessity is found the reason why Christ had to become partaker of flesh and blood with man.

What else is man? He is flesh! He is inherently weak! He is dust, clay! By providence, God limited man in his natural state. That is, man will not live eternally in this body of weakness and evil.

Man Is Mortal

Job was inspired to write of man's mundane existence. He asked the question, "Shall mortal man be more just than God? . . ." (Job 4:17).

The Apostle Paul, when writing to the Roman church, twice spoke of man's mortality. In Romans 6:12 we read: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body . . ." Again: ". . . he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies . . ." (Rom. 8:11).

Likewise, when instructing the Church at Corinth, Paul wrote of man's mortal condition. In 1 Corinthians 15:53–54 he called our natural state "mortal." And in 2 Corinthians 4:11 he stated: ". . . that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."

Yes, man is mortal! And just what is mortality? The dictionary defines it as: "1. Liable or subject to death. 2. Of or pertaining to man as a being who must die." Mortality: "1. The condition of being subject to death" (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 1970).

Mortality—a condition in which man is subject to death. Paul knew this. Besides instructing the Churches of God at Rome and Corinth in the matter, he wrote of it to the Jews who lived at Jerusalem. Those called of God should be delivered from the fear of death and bondage to which they were subjugated (Heb. 2:15). Why the need to be freed from a fear of bondage and death? Because man was created mortal—subject to death.

But, while he exists physically, he is subject to other problems. He lives in a state of fleshly appetite. Lusts reign in his physical body (Rom. 6:12). He is subject to his own carnal lusts, appetites, and motivations. He must be delivered from these. But that is another subject, to be addressed later.

Again, what is man?

Man Is Visible

Man was created of the dust of the earth. He is flesh—carnal. He is mortal. As such, he is tangible and visible. He is also temporal—temporary (2 Cor. 4:18). To become man's

Savior, Jesus Christ had to be partaker of the same condition (substance and nature) of which man is made. The Apostle John explained this necessity. Read carefully the whole of 1 John 1. In the first few verses, he says Christ was visible (able to be seen) and tangible (able to be touched). In this natural state He was a partaker with men (Ph'p. 2:7–8).

In contrast, spiritual things are not seen. They are invisible to man. Also, they are not temporal; they exist for eternity. They are not mortal.

As a visible being, man is temporal. He is mortal. He is tangible.

As such, man is inherently weak! What is his natural course?

Man Is Inherently Evil

The Bible clearly reveals that man possesses a nature *of the flesh* (1 Cor. 15:44, 46). It is not a nature which is disposed to things of God—to spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14). It is a nature with very evil tendencies (Eph. 2:1–3; Jude 10).

Why? What is this natural inclination with which man was created? Why must we look forward to its replacement with the nature of God—the divine nature (2 Pet.1:4)?

Man's nature, like his flesh, is weak—a fact God remembers (Ps. 103:14). Our natural bodies are bodies of sin (Rom. 6:6; Rom. 7:25; Col. 2:11; 1 Pet. 3:21). Conception and birth are not sin, but the very orientation and motivation of the physical body is toward wrong—SIN. The Word of God calls it the lust of (residual within) the flesh. It is not in man to be anything but what he is naturally. He cannot change that fact. And there is not one single mortal who can will to do otherwise (1 Kings 8:46).

Man's "old self"—the unregenerated natural self—corrupts, perverts, and rebels according to innate deceitful lusts (Eph. 4:22; 1 Pet. 4:2). By nature, man produces his own domain of difficulty (Job 5:7). He is what he is. He simply cannot lift himself by his own bootstraps—that is, he cannot by his own volition be something he is not.

The wretchedness of flesh (man) proceeds from his capability to think. From his heart (mind, the rational component of man) proceeds all evil—the real manifestations of carnality (Mark 7:15–23; Gen. 8:21; Jer. 17:9; Ps. 94:11). He is desperately wicked, though he often does not realize this fact. The beginning step to conversion is the simple recognition of what he is. He must recognize the contrast between himself and God. God is perfect and never needs to repent or change. Man, on the other hand, is by nature a liar and wrongly motivated—necessitating repentance (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29).

Born of flesh, he is subject to his own nature. So he is, by nature, evil. He does not know how to direct his own life. He is helpless and defenseless against his own nature until *intervention* by God.

Help is assured, in God's own time. That help is a power by which man can overcome himself. He can suppress the carnal nature and begin to manifest the divine, spiritual nature. That potential will be made plain later.

Suffice it to say, at this time, man's nature is in direct contrast to the nature of God. Man possesses carnal, fleshly nature. God's nature is divine—spiritual.

Man in his natural state cannot even view God. He cannot comprehend the spiritual. Man in his natural state is limited.

Man Cannot Look Upon God and Live

Spiritual things are invisible. They cannot be observed by the physical eye. When one understands the power and majesty of God, this fact will prove to be a great blessing—not a curse.

Moses was informed of this circumstance. He wrote the instructions of God: "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (Ex. 33:20). The glory, power, majesty, and brilliance of God would be totally insufferable to man. His splendor is awesome. Only those born into immortality can look upon God and live (1 John 3:2).

Realizing that the physical cannot observe spiritual things—that the physical would be consumed by the spiritual power of God—it is not hard to understand the writing of the Apostle Paul. He wrote: ". . . flesh and blood [the physical] cannot inherit the kingdom of God [the spiritual realm] . . ." (1 Cor. 15:50). Therefore, as Paul went on to explain, this mortal must put on immortality. That is what the plan of God is all about.

The physical is a manifestation of weakness. It is the realm in which man is called of God and subjected to trial, thereby being refined and made worthy to inherit eternal life—immortality. In God's mercy, He limited the time man must spend in the condition of weakness and duress. How long did God say—by those who wrote His Word—man could exist physically?

Man Exists but for a Moment

God created time. Out of eternity He designed a span of time in which certain physical relevancies exist. That is, a year has no meaning except as compared to something either longer or shorter. Consider: A second is understood in its relationship to a minute. Likewise, a minute is compared to an hour; an hour to a day; a day to a week; a week to a month; and a month to a year. But what is the significance of a year? Basically, it relates to the allotted time for man to rule himself (7,000 years). And, more personally, it relates to man's own life span (approximately 70 years).

In our day, man's allotted time is 70 years (Ps. 90:10). It is a time of trial and adversity. At times it seems like an eternity. Yet, as man looks back, his days appear to be a fleeting shadow of time. Let us note how that fleeting life is characterized in the Bible.

Job wrote:

Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.—Job 14:1

Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little.—Job 10:20.

David wrote:

Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.—Psalm 39:4–5.

When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity [margin: "breath"]. Selah.—Psalm 39:11.

For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.—Psalm 78:39.

Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?—Psalm 89:47.

For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore and ten; and if by reason of

strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.—Psalm 90:9–10.

My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass.—Psalm 102:11.

For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.—Psalm 103:14–16.

Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him! Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away.—Psalm 144:3–4.

Solomon wrote:

For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?—Ecclesiastes 6:12.

James wrote:

Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.—James 4:14.

Peter wrote:

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.—1 Peter 1:24.

In contrast to eternity, man's temporal existence is extremely short. We are here today and gone tomorrow. Surely, such brevity does not in itself fulfill the will and purpose of God for man!

There is much beyond the veil of this flesh. Our hope is a hope of eternal life—life inherent within.

In the mercy and wisdom of God, He made the time of trial and testing very short. Usually, it is only when man takes his eyes off that eternal purpose and fixes them upon the vapor of the present that he fails to fulfill the awesome purpose of God.

How awesome is the requirement of *FAITH!* Let us never lose hope. We are flesh, human, of the dust, mortal. Our time is short. But if we are called of God, new life has been generated in us.

For the remainder of the subtopic "What Is Man?" we will wait until the October *Monthly Letter*. Otherwise, this letter would be far too long. Mr. Jean Aviolat will be writing the September issue.

Once again, we here in Eugene convey our profound, heartfelt love and regards. Before long we will be together again at Seaside—keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. We joyously anticipate that time.

Until next time, take care. You who willingly obey the faith once delivered are the priceless possessions of God and His Son Jesus Christ, who purchased you with His own blood. As ministers of Jesus Christ, we sincerely appreciate the privilege of serving you.

All our love and respect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Raymond C. Cole