

Church of God, The Eternal

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The Two Facets of Divine Revelation—Part X Even Though Codified, Man Cannot Understand or Obey the Spiritual

September 1981

Dear Brethren:

Again, a heartfelt greetings to all. Those of us here in Eugene are generally well. We sincerely do trust and pray that those scattered across the U.S.A. and around the world are equally well.

Feast fever is mounting. How joyous it is to know God's way of life! David knew the joys of that way. So do the faithful of God today.

What a marvelous event we should experience this year. If we come together for the purposes for which God ordained these ways of life, we cannot avoid experiencing a most memorable and joyous occasion.

The purpose of the Feast is spiritual. The physical factors, at best, play a minor, secondary role. The extent to which we confuse these roles, is the precise level of our potential dissatisfaction.

With all that lies in us, the ministry is planning and studying to give relative and timely sermons. We want to give the necessary meat of understanding and need of the times in which we live.

Your part is to come prepared to contribute to and enjoy a brief rehearsal and foretaste of the Kingdom of God. Come with minds saturated with spiritual things. Be cognizant of the times in which we live. Be prepared to live the Truth—in relationship to one another—live ALL of it! We can experience the joy unspeakable, mentioned by Peter, only if we aggressively live the truths which we know and equally aggressively subdue the self. We all must remember, the only person who can rob us of our Spirit-given happiness and joy is our own self. Jesus Christ is indeed an example. Despite the persecution which He received, He could say at the time of His departure from the earth, He was leaving His peace and joy for us to experience. No man can take our happiness from us. We alone can give

it up—regardless of the pressures. Just live the Truth of God to the full and it cannot be taken from you.

Brethren, all of us have experienced so marvelous a time in the past six years—at the Feast. Yet, this year promises to be of great significance to us all.

Difficulties are mounting daily. It takes little judicious perspicacity on the part of anyone to see the gloomy and forbidding horizons of tomorrow. Unemployment is mounting. Crime is growing rapidly—at every level of society. Corruption is rampant. Real solutions to problems go begging. Yet we know darker days lie just ahead. Are we spiritually prepared for these inevitabilities? Or, do we look for "fall guys"?

Let us take it all in stride, physically! Yet, on the other hand, spiritually, making every provision for the times. We must not become indifferent. But we must bridge this time during which little, if any, good can be done. We must keep our eyes on tomorrow—the real purpose for our call and training now. Will we be prepared to assume roles of leadership at the appointed time? Will we be capable of giving positive and beneficial direction to a world ready to receive help? It's up to us NOW.

For this month, one more letter in the series entitled "The Two Facets of Divine Revelation" is given. It is our continued hope you will study the content deeply, that you will be greatly helped in your basic Bible understanding. We have enjoyed preparing the material for you.

Here it is!

Salvation is the business of God. Salvation is God's ultimate objective relative to man—a physical being. In precisely the same way, all physical things exist for a purpose. Generally speaking, man does not understand that purpose—certainly not the ultimate spiritual purpose and even equally tragic, the physical realm and his personal relationship to it.

How many realize they are being held accountable, by the Creator God, for *how* they handle and use the physical earth—their God-given possession? In a more finite way, what about our own little domain? Our homes? Farms? Businesses? Equipment? Are they kept in top shape—pruned and maintained as God commanded?

To a very great degree many do not handle wisely or acceptably their physical responsibilities. Eating! Drinking! Routine, daily work! Neighbor relationships! Relationships with government and its agencies! All of them physical. How then can we

possibly expect to handle spiritual responsibility? We can't. For, as Christ said, relative to spiritual responsibility, "with men it is impossible." Human beings do not have the heart, mind or will to perform spiritually. Men were created carnal, flesh beings. But as such they are learning very valuable lessons—lessons which will take on meaning one of these days when God strips back the natural blindness.

Being a God of order and plan, He has kept secret His way of life until He intended to make spiritual obedience possible. The time of that initial revealing occurred at the first appearance of Jesus Christ.

God's Word Kept Secret from Beginning: Revealed in Christ's Day

Paul, when explaining his commission and the message he taught, said to the Church at Colosse:

Who [Paul himself] now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the *mystery which hath been hid* from ages and from generations, but *now is made manifest* to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:24–27).

The Word of God had been kept secret—a mystery—from man's beginning until the days of Christ and the apostles. At that time it was revealed only to those called to be saints. That revelation was given through a human instrument whom God had called to proclaim that way of life. Salvation was the essence of that mystery—the existence of such a hope and the way to achieve it.

A goodly portion of the Bible, the Old Testament, had been written and canonized long before the days of Christ and the apostles. Yet, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul emphatically stated that the mystery of salvation had *not been revealed until his own day*. Explanations, and interpretations given prior to this time were assumptions and often perversions on the part of any who attempted to expound them. Even the angels, and prophets—many of whom God used to codify portions of the Old Testament—did not understand. The real meaning was made known in the days of Paul and the other apostles. Jesus Christ was sent to *live* that Word. He was the way personified. Now by a miraculous act of God and the influence of the Holy Spirit, men could understand the codified Word and for the first time live up to its spiritual requirements.

When writing to the Church at Rome, Paul dogmatically stated the same thing. He said:

Now to him [Christ] that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel [which he had been commissioned to proclaim—Col. 1:26], and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery [mystery of God's salvation of mankind], which was *kept secret since the world began*, But *now is made manifest*, and by the scriptures [only the Old Testament existed at that time] of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations [but not all peoples in all nations] for the obedience of faith (Rom. 16:25–26).

As noted in the July 1981 *Monthly Letter*, the words of God, the Scriptures, had been codified at the time of Moses. He had been commanded by God to write down the instructions which he had received of Him. Prior to that appointed time, the truths which God had uttered periodically—to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah and others—were orally bequeathed from generation to generation. Scripture had not been canonized. This is the feat which became the responsibility of Ezra principally—others no doubt aided in the massive undertaking.

Without elaboration, we will recall from earlier *Monthly Letters*, the prophets uttered words which they did not understand. Logic makes it abundantly clear that *God did not intend that men should become responsible*, therefore accountable, at the time of physical codification of those words. Before such accountability could exist some other miraculous intervention on the part of God had to occur.

Interestingly, that mysterious and miraculous intervention on the part of God gave meaning to the words which had been previously recorded. Those called, in whom a miraculous change occurred, *now* understood what previously had been perverted, distorted, rejected, or at best personally interpreted. They understood the *true, genuine, spiritual meaning*. In other words, *the revelation was an understanding of the codified Word*.

In retrospect, what we want to understand, thoroughly, in this issue of the *Monthly Letter* is this: Though codified, the words of God could not be understood. In the case of men, what is written on the pages of books, letters, etc., represents the essence of the minds involved. What you see and read is generally the sum total of the matter. Not so with the recorded Word of God. Written, yes! But the *real meaning* cannot be comprehended by the natural mind. It takes the spiritual mind of God. And that mind can be received only by those called of God and to whom He will give it. That is a matter to be covered later.

In order to understand, thoroughly and properly, what the Apostle Paul wrote, both to the Romans and the Colossians, it is necessary to introduce a related concept stated by Jesus Christ. He said:

. . . I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast *hid these things* from the wise and prudent, and hast *revealed* them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will *reveal* him (Matt. 11:25–27).

The Truth was hidden. But, in addition, so was the true, genuine identity of the Father and the Son. Why? Because it seemed right and good in the Father's eyes. And until God calls and elects to remove that blindness this will remain a fact of life.

The prophets of old wrote about Christ! They were moved by the Holy Spirit to record the words of life. Yet, they were not understood. The people did not comprehend the words which were written and the prophets themselves did not understand those things which they had written. They wrote them for a future generation, a people in a different time. To those people God made known the riches of a way of life and the reward of faithful obedience. That generation of people lived at the time of Christ's first appearance.

Can men, if deliberately kept blinded and by circumstance born at the wrong time, rightly be held accountable? Of course not! These are factors yet to be explained and understood.

For the present, let us keep these following concepts in mind. We cannot understand the essence of this subject without an understanding of the cardinal principles involved.

- 1) God, through Christ, created man as a physical entity.
- 2) As a physical being, his natural grasp is limited to the physical domain.
- 3) Spiritual things are hidden (not understood) by the physical mind.
- 4) Truth is spiritual.
- 5) For man to understand Truth, the way of life, a miraculous change must transpire.

6) Such a change is experienced only by those called of God.

7) And, finally, that change is the destruction of the old self and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, Christ in us the Hope of glory.

Those truly called of God understand all things—the physical and the spiritual (1 Cor. 2:14–15). But all others remain blind to spiritual things.

With the exception of some "specialized" understanding given to our forefathers (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and even Moses or David) and the prophets (1 Pet. 1:10–12), the Word of God was not really understood down through the ages though written and codified. As Paul said, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the real Truth was not revealed until the day of Jesus Christ—His first appearance.

The Law of God Codified in Moses' Day: But Existed from Eternity

That which was eternal was now codified. It was put in written form by Moses and subsequent authors.

What was eternal? The Word of God, including His laws, are spirit and they are life, said Jesus Christ. Spiritual things are eternal.

Paul speaks of this introduction of the Law. In the third chapter of Galatians, he says to the Churches of Galatia (Asia Minor): "Wherefore then serveth ["serveth" is an addition] the law? It was *added* because of transgressions, till the seed should come . . ." (Gal. 3:19). The word "added" is "*prostithemi*" which means to place additionally; i.e. lay beside, annex, repeat.

To some, verse 19 speaks only of the sacrificial element added some time after God uttered the Law in the hearing of all Israel. Yet, the term "law" has no such restrictive usage. The Greek word for "law" is "*nomos*". It generally and specifically refers to all law given by God. In a very broad sense, Jesus Christ used that very word to refer to a goodly portion of the Old Testament. For the original Scriptures were referred to as the Law, the Prophets and the Writings.

Taking the word for "law" in a broad literal sense and analyzing the third chapter of Galatians on that basis, we can hardly escape the conclusion that Paul is speaking of the totality of law. In so doing, the eternal value and need of the Law is not thwarted at all. Paul is simply stating that the Law was given in codified form (a written constitution for the

nation of Israel) until the time of Christ. With the appearance of Christ, law was not abrogated. On the contrary, that which existed eternally prior to the day it was recorded in a physical document, now (at the appearance of Christ) was once again to be elevated to its rightful spiritual domain. For we, you and I, now must serve God in the Spirit. Mere letter obedience is no longer acceptable to God. Since the Holy Spirit had not been given to Israel, letter obedience was all that God required of them. Today, obedience must come from the heart. In fact, one of the significant purposes of the first appearance of Christ was to magnify the Law and make it honorable (Isa. 42:21). Further, much of Christ's actual three-and-one-half year ministry was devoted to the spiritual magnification of that Law. For a beginning, note Matthew five, six and seven.

The Law (codified) was to bring us to Christ. It taught us of man's utter helplessness of himself. Man needed help. That help given in the time of need was Christ. By His coming (the absolute necessity of which the Law pointed to) was that Law abrogated? Absolutely not! Jesus Christ, who as God cannot lie, said: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law [a section of the Bible], or the prophets [another section of the Bible]: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil [live it fully and completely]" (Matt. 5:17). The death of Christ did not destroy the Law! It substantiated it.

What Paul said in Galatians three was this: The Law was physically codified until the time of Christ. With the coming of Christ, that exclusive *physical relationship* was rendered null and void. The Law was then again elevated to its true spiritual intent. As Paul said, the Law (codified) was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we could be justified by *faith* (Gal. 3:24). That *faith* was belief in the sacrificed blood of Christ which freed us from guilt (as well as all mankind)—a guilt from which the blood of bulls and goats could not free us.

But in this letter our purpose is to limit the scope of the subject to the written, constitutional introduction of the Law. Though the Law had previously existed and was now made into a "letter" obligation upon the children of Israel, real obedience was not possible. Its codified form, however, acted as a *conscience* for the people of Israel.

How?

When writing to the Romans, Paul said that sin was not really imputed until the time of Moses—even though the Law existed from the beginning (Rom. 5:13–14). The obvious implication is that once the Law was codified (the letter form), mortal men were physically accountable. Paul shows the spiritual relationship. Before God reveals the Truth, Truth exists, yet men are not accountable. Then, when the Truth is made known our weaknesses and failures smite the conscience (Rom. 7:13). Sin by means of the commandment becomes exceeding sinful.

The Word of God has always existed. Yet it was kept hidden from men until the day of revelation at the time of Jesus Christ. At one time in human history it was codified—written in graphic and tangible form. It became the national constitution of the chosen nation of Israel.

The Word of God reduced to a letter form! A miracle in its own right. But could the people *really* obey it?

Codified? Yes: Obey It? No

Men are physical. They possess only carnal nature. The Law of God is spiritual. It is a verbalized form of the very character of God—the divine nature.

The nature of flesh and the nature of Spirit are worlds apart. They are antagonistic to each other (Gal. 5:17). Can the natural mind arbitrarily, by choice, will to perform the spiritual? An utter impossibility! Can a man, by choice, manifest the instinct, smelling and hearing capabilities of a dog? Of course not! A dog's olfactory perception is one to one million times greater than man's. Yet both the dog and man reside in the realm of the physical. They are separated only by design and purpose as willed by God. How much greater is the difference between flesh and spirit!

The Scriptures had been written. They could be read and pondered by men. But could they understand what they had read?

Those in the days of Jesus Christ read the Bible—that part which had been canonized by the days of Christ. Did they understand what they had read? No! Jesus Christ said to those whom He addressed: "Search the scriptures [the Old Testament]; for in them ye think ye have eternal life . . ." (John 5:39). They had read. But they did not comprehend, even though in their own minds they thought they knew what they had read. The proof of their own blindness was standing right there before them. Christ was that very Word personified and yet they did not realize it.

All the way back to Moses, the people who had read those codified words (the letter of the word) did not realize or understand what they were hearing or subsequently reading. In fact, Jesus Christ stated that the same test would always apply. If we believe Moses then we can believe Him. However, if we reject Moses then we have already rejected Jesus (John 5:45–47).

Was it really possible for the people of the nation of Israel to obey? Did God give the Law and the Word intending that those people of old obey?

Joshua, as inspired by God, knew and understood this spiritual principle. For, when the people in emotional fervor, cried out for the covenant ratification, Joshua said:

. . . Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good (Josh. 24:19–20).

What was the reaction of the people? The same reaction which causes people to create heretical perversions in the name of God.

"And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:21). In other words, don't deceive us Joshua. We know what is right! We can figure this thing out for ourselves. What makes you think you are the only one who can wisely evaluate the situation?

And Joshua responded?

"Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses" (Josh. 24:22).

To Joshua's appraisal can be added the very voice of God, Himself. When contemplating the second ratification of the covenant (contract between God and Israel) God said: "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever" (Deut. 5:29).

Moses is calling to the attention of the people their initial response when God uttered His Law and proposed to give them all the words of a new and binding covenant. In their emotion they were willing to receive anything God gave to Moses, whom He had commanded to speak to the children of Israel. Their motive was good. *But they did not know their limitations.* The whole history of that nation is a living testimony to the accuracy of God's statement. They did not obey ever. In fact, they couldn't. As we shall see, letter obedience only was possible! But this they did not perform either.

Only Physical Obedience Possible

God called the children of Israel out of Egypt. En route to the promised land, God progressively revealed the conditions for their inheritance of that land! What God had delivered to them they could fulfill. What they could not perform was never revealed to them by God. Remember the inspired statements of the Apostle Paul. For until his time the principles of salvation had never been made known. They were a mystery—hidden from the understanding and the capability to perform of even Israel—though called of God. Called to render a limited act of obedience.

In Exodus we read of the initial conditions of God. Israel had fled Egypt, based on promises God made through His own servant, Moses. They were in the wilderness of Sinai. God beckoned Moses to come up into the mount to converse with Him. There, God says:

Now therefore, if ye will *obey* my voice indeed, and *keep* my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel (Ex. 19:5–6).

Again, in Exodus 23:22, God reiterates the promise. He dogmatically states (read vs. 20–22): ". . . if thou shalt indeed *obey* his [angel's] voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries." What obedience did God expect from physical Israel? We have already seen, the spiritual form of obedience was, by birth and nature, an impossibility. But before analyzing, let us consider yet a few more promises of God.

In Deuteronomy 11:26–28, Moses records:

Behold, I [God] set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye *obey* the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day; And a curse, if ye *will not obey* the commandments of the Lord your God . . .

Was this proposition an exercise in futility on God's part? He knew their natural hearts and minds! He was their Creator! Why lay before His chosen such a conditional agreement?

Obedience was required regardless of the temptations, pressures and administrative failures. By such circumstances God proves the integrity, dedication and purpose of His people (Deut. 13:3). In verse 4 we read: "Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave

unto him" (Deut. 13:4). Obedience was commanded. Did God command and expect from the children of Israel what they could *not* humanly perform? If not, what obedience did He require?

The answer to the above questions could not have been given until after the first appearance of Christ. Only then were God's real purpose and way of salvation made known. Until then they remained a mystery—hidden until that time. Moses was inspired to write of such circumstances even though, in all likelihood, he himself, did not specifically understand what he recorded.

In Deuteronomy 29:29 we read a very surprising statement. The statement taken at face value seems to reflect no relevancy to the subject of the chapter. It reads: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us [Israel] and to our children [but not to Gentiles] forever, *that we may do all the words of this law.*" Whatever had been revealed (given, made known) was for the purpose of some form of specific obedience. What form of obedience was possible?

Paul explaining how the Law had a claim on the lives of all human beings made the above mystery clear. He, inspired of the Holy Spirit, wrote:

. . . now we are delivered from the [penalty of the] law [its claim on our physical lives], that being dead [through conversion and voluntary baptism] wherein we were held [death frees from all things]; that we should serve in newness of the spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter [physical codification of the law which Israel had received] (Rom. 7:6).

Letter obedience was possible! All that is required in letter obedience is a technical fulfillment. But such technical obedience is woefully inadequate. Why? It does not change the insidious nature and heart of those involved. Spiritually speaking, one who hates another (attitude of heart and mind) is a murderer. All murderers are worthy of death. One who covets (a sin totally unseen to the human eye) is a breaker of the Law. He, too, is worthy of death. All of God's laws have both a letter and spiritual application. In ancient days letter obedience only was required. Today, both letter and spiritual obedience are required. It is impossible to separate the letter out from spiritual obedience. One may obey the letter only—excluding the spiritual intent. But there is no way, within the realm of logic and reason, to obey spiritually and avoid the letter intent.

Human nature being what it is—absolutely opposed to the laws of God and incapable of obedience (Rom. 8:7)—death was an inevitable conclusion. This was the curse God referred to so frequently in the Law—the first five books of the Bible. No mercy was employed. The seriousness of the situation is attested to by Paul, in Hebrews 10:24–29.

How different is the intent and purpose of the Spirit?

Today the same Law is inexorably binding but from a totally different perspective. The New Testament ministry *must* teach the spiritual application of the Word of God—including the Law (2 Cor. 3:6). Why? Because under the terms of the Old Covenant no mercy was afforded! If one sinned (depending on the type of sin), the only allowable solution was death. Yes, for Sabbath breaking, desecration of Holy Days, lying (under certain conditions), having another god before the Eternal, as well as murder or adultery. Under the terms of the New Covenant those sins can be forgiven, provided proper repentance occurs and the initial intent was not the result of a disbelief in the validity of the Law (Gal. 2:16–21). Paul clearly denounces the concept that Christ died for sin and therefore the Law is no longer in force. As he clearly states, why should Christ die for something which was to be rebuilt—i.e. if Christ died for our sins (the transgression of the Law)—how can we after accepting the efficacy of that sacrifice return to the very reason for His death in the first place? What an enigma professing Christians make out of the grace of God.

The obedience demanded by God under the terms of the Old Covenant was letter—technical obedience. True and original intent—spiritual obedience—was not possible. God stated that fact (Deut. 5:29). And Joshua knew and understood it (Josh. 24:14–28).

Why then did God give the Law to ancient Israel? They could not really obey it. Yet the ways of God are not without purpose!

Two Reasons Why Law Was Originally Given

Natural man cannot of himself understand or obey the spiritual dimension of the Law—Word of God. This fact becomes all the more meaningful when we remember that God's Law and Word are Spirit and life. What was given to ancient Israel as a national constitution was a significant application of those high, honorable and perfect spiritual principles. And God gave them to Israel for unusual purpose.

First, it is imperative to remember that no promise of eternal life was ever offered under the terms of the Old Covenant. Only good health, abundance and longevity of physical life. These are the maximum results of any physical relationship. Yet, there was an overriding purpose which transcends any personal and individual gain to Israelites.

After having been given the Law, a favorable national climate for technical obedience (God willed to remove all adverse influence from that promised land) and the necessary human instruction set the stage for a major human experiment. With all conditions favorable, could Israel be true to their physical call and moral obligation? Or, would they fall prey to their own lustful, greedy and devious natures? If so, how worthy were these lessons to subsequent generations—especially in these last days?

One—in terms of human misery Israel wrote some significant lessons for us today. The Bible is a history of the chosen people's failures. To misunderstand that significant purpose makes God look effete, incapable and a terrible failure in His own Creation.

In chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians, Paul discusses the problems and weaknesses of Israel subsequent to the Red Sea crossing—while they were wandering in the Sinai Peninsula. His conclusion, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is this: "Now these things [trials and difficulties] were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (1 Cor. 10:6).

He is even more explicit in verse 11: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples [examples]: and they are written [in the pages of the Bible] for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. 10:11). See also Romans 15:4.

How plain!

The real *spiritual dimension* of the Truth—God's Word—was not made known until the days of Christ (Rom. 16:25–26 and Col. 1:26). Israel could not obey what could not be understood. As we have seen, letter obedience only was expected of them. Being human and therefore devoid of necessary spiritual help (faith is a fruit of the Holy Spirit) they could not obey and remain faithful (Heb. 4:1–2). But God chose them and gave the letter (codified) dimension of the Law to write lessons for us—those of the last days to whom God had given the Spirit after giving us a miraculous call.

Unless we come to accept and understand the great purpose of ancient Israel, the lessons they wrote for us are in vain. One of the great experiments of all time has little efficacy and meaning to blinded man until God calls and strips away that blindness. God did not call Israel of old to obtain salvation for themselves but to write morbid lessons of history which we are to use for spiritual purposes today.

Two—the infallible record (Bible) of Israel's defiance and rebellion will yet serve an auspicious purpose. By human argumentation and rejection of the Law and other sections of God's Word, man has not avoided the consequences of disobedience to that which he

thought to render null and void. On the contrary, at the very time of Christ's return, the Law will be a witness against all humanity who have not repented and turned back to God.

Moses was inspired to write, after he had completed the task of recording all the words of God:

And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book [the total book of law], until they were finished, That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be *there for a witness against thee* (Deut. 31:24–26).

Why such an urgent need? Moses explains: "For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord; and how much more after my death?" (Deut. 31:27).

After the death of Moses, yes! But when? Immediately? Or many years later?

Moses explains: "For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside [someone who knew and understood the Truth] from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the *latter days . . .*" (Deut. 31:29).

The Law—and the Word of God—was to be a witness against His people of the last days. The historical account of Israel was recorded for the benefit of those called of God. It gives examples of what NOT to do. And for those who turn away from God, that record is a witness against them.

Physical Israel could not understand! They could not obey the spiritual intent of the Law. Yet, by God's express decree and will, they wrote indelible lessons for us—those of the very last days.

Today we can honor both God and ancient Israel! How? By faithful obedience to the Truth which He delivered to us.

Next we need to turn our attention to the reasons why our forefathers could not obey. By understanding those reasons we can be sufficiently informed to effect faithful obedience.

Why Natural Man Cannot Obey the Law—Even Though Codified

Spiritual obedience is impossible to carnal man. Letter obedience was possible but not probable. Why?

The answer comes from man's Designer and Creator Himself—God. What did He know about His product? Under inspiration the Apostle Paul wrote: ". . . the carnal [natural] mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, *neither indeed can be*. So then they that are in the flesh [the natural composition] *cannot* please God" (Rom. 8:7–8).

This differentiation is precise, absolute! Where, then, is the problem? In one area only!

All men consider themselves right. For all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes (Prov. 16:2). Because we cannot take the minds of men and subject them to an advance, tried-and-proven analytical test program which would reveal man's true nature, every man can "claim" he is right in whatever pleases him. Who can challenge or deny him? It is this intangible trait or characteristic which makes deception possible—either inherent or Satanic deception.

Yet, there is a way—a way by which both the true and faithful as opposed to the carnal can be known. How? This is a crucial aspect of the next *Monthly Letter* in this series.

Our purpose, at the present, is to demonstrate abundantly that natural (carnal) man *cannot obey the Truth of God*—obedience in either letter or Spirit. For he is subject to himself. Can a leopard change his spots? Can a dog make himself human? How then can natural man make himself spiritually minded?

What is the condition of the natural man? Let the Apostle Paul, once again, answer!

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit [the Law and the Word—Rom. 7:14; John 6:63] of God: *for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them*, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). God, who created man, said emphatically through Paul that the natural man could *not* receive spiritual things. Indeed, he cannot even know them. Such understanding must, then, miraculously come at some future appointed time. In the meantime, man will behave in a characteristically natural (human flesh) manner. Can he do otherwise? Oh, how hard are the lessons of this human experience. But the ingredients of character *cannot* be learned any other way. Jesus Christ, who set the example for the called and converted, endured the same hardness of life (Heb. 5:8).

Because of the subtlety and cunningness of the natural nature, man loses faith on occasion. He is ever ready to develop his own philosophy and thereby depart from the "faith once delivered." He begins to oppose himself. Yet we are told that God will have a desire for the workmanship of His own hands. By power and purpose, God will eventually intervene on their behalf. It is in this very refining process of the last days that we can carefully note the cardinal difference between natural man and the called-out ones. Through Daniel God makes this point clear. We read: ". . . Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand" (Dan. 12:9–10).

First, understanding comes at times *appointed* by God—even to those chosen of Him. It does not come by the discretion of any individual. This fact alone makes one point clear. The Truth is deliberately and purposefully hidden until God (the author of Truth) makes it known.

Second, some who have lost their spiritual sense of direction will regain footing and orientation through tribulation. Faith is augmented through trial—trial which is one-sided only. Why a one-sided trial? Most human beings who have options will choose the easy way out. But when men have nothing to lose—society is gone, peer arrangements are shattered, jobs are irrelevant or they don't exist, friendships impossible, money and its allurements is gone and success is a hope of the bygone days—they can begin to look up and manifest faith and trust in God. Yet, even through all these trials, *only* those enlightened of God can respond. The others simply do not know Him. They cannot return to something or someone they have never known!

Simply stated, the unenlightened of the world in the last days will not understand the "whys" of these climactic events. Truth and the understanding thereof must first be given. And it is given only to those called of God.

As stated earlier, spiritual blindness has never been a philosophical deterrent to natural human beings. All assume they know and understand all about the important issues of life. They are firmly fixed and determined in their own minds. To illustrate this point, the Word of God (the Bible) gives a classic confrontation between the Jews and Jesus Christ (John 8:33–47). By birth, physical selection, the Jews had assumed they were the inheritors of the Truth. In their minds it was absolute. Yet Jesus Christ, a Jew Himself, said their premise was false. Because of His disagreement with them, they sought to kill Him. How far will professed religionists (any or all of them) go to support their contention? They will kill in order to eliminate any opposition. History proves this behavior is not limited to any one group. Even "Christians" have killed for the same reasons.

There, before a group of religionists, stood Jesus Christ—the very Word of God made flesh. Yet these religionists did not know who He was nor did they believe the words coming from His mouth. Why?

Jesus explains. He said: "Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye *cannot hear my word*" (John 8:43).

Why could they not hear the words of God? Jesus answers: "He that is of God [those called and to whom understanding is given] heareth God's words: ye therefore *hear* them *not, because ye are not of God*" (John 8:47). They were not called. Their blindness had not been removed. They could not react otherwise. Such people do not fall into the category of those *once enlightened* who have then rejected the Truth. For those who have been enlightened and who have rejected the Truth all future hope is impossible.

Let us be clear and precise. What we have seen up to this point is that natural man cannot obey God. True obedience is a spiritual requirement. Men are of the flesh—natural, carnal. And the two (flesh versus Spirit) are contrary, the one to the other (Gal. 5:17). Even though the Word is codified or lived tangibly in man's presence (Christ's life), man cannot comprehend or obey that Word. It is absolutely impossible. Men are *of this world*. The Truth is *of the Spirit*. The world cannot receive the Spirit because it cannot see it (John 14:17). What man can see is tangible. And he obeys or responds to what he can see, grasp and understand.

This natural blindness to spiritual things is just as God willed. He is the author of their very blindness (Rom. 11:8). Until He wills, man will remain ignorant of spiritual things (Rom. 11:7).

Briefly we noted that Christ was not understood or KNOWN even though He, the Word of God, lived in the flesh. Let us now substantiate this concept.

Christ Not Understood in His Day—Even Though He Was the Word in Flesh

Could men have had a better teacher? For three and one-half years Christ spoke powerfully and convincingly to multitudinous numbers of people. At the conclusion of His ministry, exactly one hundred and twenty people believed and acted on that which He taught. Why?

Of course, all who profess some form of "Christianity" today emphatically believe they would have believed and responded to Christ. In fact, they (regardless of what they

presently believe) do think they are doing the will of Christ. Yet mysteriously and tragically, these people, today, are doing no differently than the "sincere" religionists of Christ's day. They are acting on what *they think to be the Truth*. Have they not "proven" these things for themselves? But a haunting question remains: How can they prove and understand what they have never been given? For when God calls and delivers the Truth, those recipients truly KNOW and understand. They are not proving anything by themselves. They know all other ways are wrong.

To simplify: Truth must be revealed. It is revealed to those called and chosen of God only. They alone can Biblically substantiate (prove) that way of life. How? By living it. For the word "prove" means simply to try it, live it and judge by the fruits borne. Without God's Spirit it is absolutely impossible for mere mortal man to step back a few steps and systematically, honestly and accurately evaluate either the ways of flesh or the ways of God—the Spirit. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Only those given God's Spirit are spiritually oriented. They do not need to "prove" (attempt to ascertain) Truth. They KNOW and they know that they know it. All others are in total blindness regardless of conviction or belief.

One conclusion is inevitable. The one attempting to "prove" the Truth by his own human ability and effort is admitting one of two things. First, he has never been called and is therefore exercising a practice of the natural flesh. Or, second, if at one time called, he says by his present actions, "I have lost the faith and confidence once delivered."

Let us learn from the lessons and examples of Jesus Christ. There has never been a better teacher.

In John 10:6, those uncalled did not understand the teaching of Jesus Christ. This example tells us why the majority of men do not understand and respond today. All of their varied, human interpretations of God's Word are not valid.

Jesus Christ was the way and the Truth (John 14:6). He was that Truth (Word) made flesh (John 1:1 and 1 John 1:1–3). Yet, the very people standing before Him did not know who He was (John 8:18–19). Who was He? The way and the Truth! What those people did not recognize was *that* way and *that* Truth. Did they admit their ignorance? On the contrary. Because the Truth was in opposition to their convictions, they set about to kill Him. He was the Son of God, yet they knew Him not (John 10:30–36).

Amazing as it is, human beings can be in the very presence of Truth and completely miss its significance and meaning. In fact they will often deny and reject it. They will fight and kill to resist it. Those of Christ's day simply did not KNOW who He was (John 8:21–32).

Christ went out of His way to conceal the Truth. It was not His intent, or that of the Father, to make the Truth broadly available (Matt. 13:10–17). It was given only to those called of God. And they were precious few at that time.

Men live in total blindness until Truth is revealed. And when revealed, they KNOW who Christ is, for He is the unchanging Truth and way of life.

Natural human blindness is so impervious and so total that once called, the servants of God know only that which is spiritually revealed. As a perfect and wise character builder, that Truth is systematically and wisely unveiled by God. On the one hand He has put *times* and *events* under His power and tutelage only. On the other hand, God carefully reveals and nurtures His young children so that spiritual miscarriage is not a high likelihood. He knows how fast each one of us can be trained and can accept new challenges and responsibilities. He builds on the basis of that individual need (Jer. 17:9–10). It is not, therefore, startling to realize that a time existed when even His own (Christ's) disciples could not comprehend the Truth.

A Time When Christ's Disciples Could not Understand

As we have seen, Truth must be given (revealed). Jesus taught by means of parables to insure the secrecy of that Truth (Matt. 13:10–17). He told His disciples that they had been chosen to receive that Truth (Matt. 10:11). If they received the Truth at that time only, it is most obvious they too were blind and ignorant of the ways of life. They were in mutual darkness along with all the others to whom Christ made reference (Matt. 13).

Receiving Truth occurs at the time appointed by God. At the same time, the scope of that Truth revealed is at the discretion of God.

The disciples *grew in understanding* as they were taught by Jesus Christ. Note the following examples:

1) John 12:16—At the time the message was spoken, the understanding was not given. Only at the time of the actual fulfillment of the message was this particular part of Truth made understandable.

2) Luke 18:31–34—The whole reality, meaning and significance of Christ's closing trials, death, burial and resurrection were hidden from the disciples. They simply did not understand. At the appointed time, the blanket of secrecy was removed so that the eyes of the disciples understood. Even then, the vast majority of human beings did not understand.

3) Luke 24:44–45—For three and one-half years Christ had faithfully taught the disciples. Yet real understanding, and subsequent conviction, did not occur until a precise appointed time. When Christ willed, He made those priceless principles understood. For the first time the Scriptures took on a new dimension.

Called or uncalled, no spiritual Truth can be understood until made available by God. The uncalled understand none of it—from a spiritual perspective. Only occasionally can they perform some limited letter aspect of it (Rom. 2:14–15).

The called can understand and perform only what God has revealed and given the ability (Holy Spirit) to perform.

Since the beginning of time, the world has lived in religious confusion. According to God's express permission Satan has made absolutely certain of that. But man, himself, does not help the situation. For his natural antagonisms are against God and His Law.

In such a sea of confusion, the Word of God literally appeared. He was made flesh and dwelt among them. Yet, they could not comprehend it, much less obey it.

Today human beings are still human beings. Their minds are still carnal. There has been no residual change in the composition, philosophy or purpose of man. Do we, therefore, think the Truth will be more easily recognizable today?

Truth Lived in Christ's Chosen Servants Today Not Understood

Christ was the Son of God. He was the perfection of the Way—the very Word of God. He was that Way in action and thought. But the world knew Him not. The perpetrators of His death did not know who they were slaying. They had not rejected Him because they deliberately and knowingly rejected the Truth. For in their minds, what *they* believed was the Truth. Since Jesus did not agree with them, He obviously was in error—to them.

What about the chosen of God, today? Will they be recognized? Can people by study and "the proving process" come to know the Truth? Will they know who the real servants of God are? John explains.

He wrote: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: *therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not*" (1 John 3:1). Even today, the only people who know they are God's children are those

called of God. All others live in blindness (spiritual darkness) until enlightened by God. They cannot know or understand because it is God alone who can strip back that blindness. When God removes the blindness, He also makes spiritual obedience possible (Jer. 31:31–34 and Heb. 10:16).

Surely there can be no doubt. Natural man, of himself, cannot know the Truth. Even in the presence of Truth he cannot recognize it. Neither does he possess the will to obey it. Some strange and mysterious change is necessary before obedience is possible. Herein is the reason for subsequent installments of this series of *Monthly Letters*.

We do sincerely trust and pray your reading and studying of the contents of this present installment has been both inspirational and rewarding. It has been our pleasure to so labor on your behalf. Thanks again, for allowing us the privilege of serving you.

Our love and prayers always. May God ever bless you in all ways, as you more perfectly yield to Him.

With much love and respect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the text "With much love and respect,".

Raymond C. Cole