

Church of God, The Eternal

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The Two Facets of Divine Revelation—Part XI Eternal Life Was Not Offered or Revealed Until Jesus Christ

November 1981

Dear Brethren:

A very warm and special greetings from all of us at Eugene. Our thoughts and prayers are with you daily.

God gave us a very great, marvelous and meaningful Feast. Now is the time to act on the word heard. Never are we more motivated than at the time of inception—in this case the beginning of both the inspiration and the knowledge.

Little can we deny that God Himself gave us profound purpose and cause to add to our faith and conviction. One wonders what it will take for us to respond if we fail to recognize His goodness and love so benevolently tendered to us year after year at the Feast of Tabernacles. Let us never be guilty of taking His love for granted!

A Reiteration of Our Foundational Principles

From the beginning of this most unique and incredibly small operation many things were apparent. Let us rehearse them once again. To forget could be catastrophic.

First, the church of the last days had apostatized just as the Bible indicated it would when they changed the doctrine.

Second, Truth can come to men by divine revelation only. Once revealed we must not depart therefrom. Consistency of belief is the result of faith—the faith initially given.

Third, the initial revelation is always through the ministry just as God said it would be. Those called of God will hear the message and respond to that proclamation. Individuals may fail, but the ministry will continue until the return of Christ.

Fourth, the Body of belief will always be *one*. God is not the author of confusion. Those involved in the proliferation of doctrinal confusion, personal independence and other divisionary concepts may be scattered sheep but God will deal with them until all return to *one* common fold—the Body of belief.

Fifth, the Body of belief does exist somewhere in the last days. Many, though constantly *searching* for that Truth, cannot find it. Only a tiny handful of people will remain faithful and endure to the end (Matt. 7:13–14).

Sixth, as a result of God's direct and personal intervention in their lives—via tribulation—many will (though once called) be able to separate themselves from their own mental fortification *against* the Truth of God. All the ways of a man are right in his own eyes.

Seventh, the true, genuine and responsive child of God will *not* discuss doctrine, or other aspects of Truth, with any who are guilty of perversion or corruption of the Truth which they received. Those who keep options open are only seeking justification of personal concepts. They are not subject to the Truth of God or the ministry which God kept faithful. This principle is made abundantly clear in the Bible example of New Testament apostasy.

Eighth, not all knowledge has been made available. The faith once delivered is that level of Truth which God has made available at any given time. That level of Truth must not be changed. Change of doctrine is not approved by God, for God does not reveal error.

The faith does not preclude spiritual growth—the adding to existing knowledge. Indeed, the true Christian must continue to grow—both in knowledge and personal overcoming.

Ninth, true Christians *know* who they are. Their works and attitude substantiate them. Those works are: original call, repentance, baptism (induction into the Body of Christ), spiritual growth, faithfulness in time of apostasy, oneness in the Body of belief, teachableness (by God's faithful ministry), and refusal to countenance any doctrine or concept which is *contrary* to the initial revelation.

Tenth, we will not and have not laid or underscored any claims for ourselves. We are perfectly content—as was Christ—to let our works and beliefs speak for themselves. However, in this concept must not be construed any belief that all or any given number possess the Truth in part. All, therefore, are of God. *Christ is not divided*. Any such belief in diversification of doctrine is a Satanic attempt to accommodate the heretical tendency of

men. The Doctrine is one. Baptism and Faith are one. The Word of life is one. There is only one way of life. That way was given to someone. It was held faithfully by someone to the actual return of Christ.

In the final analysis, the responsibility falls squarely upon the shoulders of each. Faith cannot be legislated. It is an act of personal conviction.

If we are still looking, we are only advertising the fact we exist in the state of confusion. True Christians know. They act on that faith.

We have made our decisions. We know what we believe and why we believe it!

Of course anyone can depart from the faith. We do not deny that. How can you properly evaluate this potential?

Since growth of knowledge is through the ministry—by divine revelation—it cannot be on the basis of individual ideas. Neither can it be on the premise of new knowledge which has not *yet* been accepted or formed a part of requisite faith. What, then, can be used?

The only premise made abundantly clear by the Bible is "the faith once delivered." Before the apostasy, what was our conviction—the basis of our original baptism? That faith can see us through *times* of doubt, misgiving, uncertainty! We, if genuine Christians, do not lose our perspective. A time of storm is an unacceptable time to make any determinations. We can weather such circumstances only if our plan and purpose are held intact through the time of trial.

The Feast of Tabernacles 1981 has just come to a conclusion. We felt a rehearsal of basic premises was needful. By using the inspiration of this monumental Feast, we can now go on to new endeavors with awesome resolve.

Now to the next installment of the series entitled, "The Two Facets of Divine Revelation."

Ancient Israel Was Not Promised Eternal Life

Synopsis: In the last letter of this series, we should have seen clearly that God's people of old did not see or understand the spiritual meaning of the Law which they had received. Codified? Indeed, it was. But a physical revelation does not equal a spiritual revelation.

The actual mystery of the Law remained secret until the first appearance of Jesus Christ. One objective of His appearance was the unveiling of spiritual things. He came to make these things known to selected individuals. For even in the day of Jesus Christ, few people were enlightened and given the ability to obey God's Word.

The summation of the matter is this: Codification (physical manifestation) of the words of life does not of itself make obedience possible. Some mysterious, miraculous change must transpire in the individual human experience. That mystery is a *second* revelation. The first was the actual manifestation of the Word in book form—*The Holy Bible*. It was further manifested as the life of Christ—the Word made flesh—who lived approximately two thousand years ago. Though the Word of God was glorified in the body of Christ, human beings did not perceive what they were seeing, hearing or handling. Only those called specifically by God could really understand.

That knowledge which the called possessed was the direct result of a revelation—a *second* revelation, if you please. Though written in a book which we hallow and hold sacred, the contents cannot be understood until an appointed time, and only to those whom God specifically calls.

Let us thoroughly understand this concept.

Salvation Is to Know God and Christ

Men live transitory lives. They are here today and gone tomorrow—"a vapor"; "as the grass of the field"; or, "the passing of the weaver's shuttle." In this abbreviated time, man grows to maturity, generally educates himself, enters gainful employment, rears children. Then he dies. Were it not for the process of procreation, there would be little or no remembrance of earlier generations.

Is this fleeting existence all that is intended for man? Or is there some more significant and meaningful purpose?

Salvation is promised. Salvation is opposite to the role of birth, growth, labor and death. It is the opportunity to inherit life—eternally—not merely birth into another transitory existence.

Just what is salvation—this hope of inherited eternity?

In Jesus' most meaningful prayer following His final Passover, when humanly existing on this earth, He said: ". . . this *is* life eternal, that they might know thee [the Father] the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). Eternal life is to KNOW God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Christ stated this as a fact.

Since men do not have eternal life resident within themselves, it is obvious, from Christ's statement in John, that natural man does not know either Christ or God. Further, if life everlasting is equated to knowing both the Father and the Son, a very special revelation to man is indeed essential. Also, since man is subject to his own natural limits and inherent capabilities, he cannot find out who God and Christ are by his own native ability. This knowledge can come only from a source outside of himself!

From whom? How can man come to know God and Christ?

Jesus, when instructing and training His future apostles, revealed the answer. He said:

. . . I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast *hid* these things [Truth] from the wise and prudent, and hast *revealed them* [the same Truth] unto babes. . . . All things [the words of God, Truth] 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 Son must reveal the Father. But only to those whom He wills to make Him known!

What about the Son Himself? Who reveals Him?

A lesson from the training experience of the Apostle Peter should serve us well. Christ was asking Peter what he had heard about the Son of God. Whom did they think He was? Then suddenly Christ turned to Peter himself and asked: "But whom say ye that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). Peter answered: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (vs. 16).

What was Jesus' response to Peter? He said: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood [natural mental capability] hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (vs. 17).

Eternal life is predicated upon the knowledge of the Father and the Son. Such knowledge is not physically possible for men to attain. God the Father must reveal the Son! And the Son must reveal the Father. This revelation is to those *chosen* by God.

Paul understood the implicit need of this "second" revelation. As the apostle to the Gentiles he wrote, to the Ephesian Church:

... the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may *give unto you* the spirit of wisdom and *revelation* in the *knowledge of him* [Christ]: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of this calling . . . (Eph. 1:17–18).

Was not the Word of God written many generations prior to Christ's time? As the codified Word, could not human beings avail themselves of that revelation—read it and obey it? If the Word was recorded in written fashion, was that not the only revelation necessary?

Moses and Others Recorded, but Christ Revealed the Word

As the author of the first five books of the Bible, Moses wrote down the words and instructions of God. The prophets and other servants of God *received* and *recorded* the words of God. But as we learned earlier, a mere physical reading of those recorded words does not equal spiritual understanding.

In John 17:14, Jesus told the Father that He had given—delivered—the Word to the disciples. How is it that Jesus gave them God's words, when the historical record shows that those words were already delivered and preserved by Moses? What Jesus delivered was not different from what Moses had recorded. Compare carefully, Deuteronomy 18:15–22 and John 5:39–47.

Further, Paul was inspired to write:

Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation *sent*. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they *knew him* [Christ] *not*, nor yet the voices [via the written and preserved words] of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him (Acts 13:26–27).

The Word of God existed in published form prior to the days of the Apostle Paul. Yet, in a very real sense, the Word was not given to them (those instructed by Paul) until *that very time*. As Paul explained, they had read the recorded words of the prophets but they had not understood the real message.

Again, let us emphasize: Reading the prerecorded (codified) words of God does not constitute hearing or understanding the intent and purpose of the message.

At this time, the Gentiles were given the opportunity of understanding the Word of God. Not all, but those ordained to everlasting life at that period of time (see Acts 13:46–49). What they had read or heard earlier was now understood.

The prophesied Elijah—John the Baptist—had spoken to the people. Yet, they did not understand (Matt. 17:12–13). The people did not recognize him or the Word which he spoke. In a comparable manner, Christ spoke the Word. The people knew neither Him nor the Word which He spake. The Word which Jesus Christ spoke to the people was the same Word recorded in the Scriptures. Though the people had read these Scriptures, they did not comprehend the message which Jesus spoke to them. A mere reading of the Bible does not constitute spiritual understanding. Only by revelation—a second revelation—can these recorded Scriptures be understood.

For three and one-half years Jesus Christ had taught the Truth of God. He had uttered the words of the recorded Scriptures. Yet, the disciples whom He called and was training for a future responsibility did not understand the very Scriptures which He taught until a miracle occurred. They could not be understood until their minds were opened to comprehend them (Luke 24:44–45 and John 20:9).

The recording (codifying) of God's Word can be termed a revelation. The appearance of Jesus Christ as the personified Word of God can, also, be called a revelation—a primary revelation, a physical manifestation of the Word.

A second revelation, however, is absolutely essential in order to experience a spiritual understanding of the message and intent of those same recorded Scriptures—Scriptures frequently read but not understood.

Historical Examples

There are several historical examples which substantiate the statements made above. Let us read and understand them.

Samuel, a Bible luminary, was not born with a gift of understanding the spiritual. He did not achieve a close, personal relationship with God on the basis of his own study and comprehension of the Word of God. On the contrary, he was *chosen* by God and the Truth was *given* to him. See 1 Samuel 3:7. It reads: "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the Word of the Lord *yet* revealed unto him."

Long before this point in time, Scriptures had been recorded by earlier servants of God. Yet, reading that Word did not produce understanding. The real meaning (the spiritual purpose) had to be revealed. This miraculous act of God occurred at His own time.

How? Let us continue the example of Samuel.

In 1 Samuel 3:20–21 we read: ". . . all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord."

For many years God's Word had been recorded and preserved. Samuel was carefully tutored in the physical scope of those words. Yet, he did not know God or His Word until it was revealed. That revelation occurred when God so willed, even though it was physically manifested that Samuel was destined to be a prophet of God.

The prophets of God were willing and obedient servants of the Eternal Himself. Yet, frequently, they were given messages—words—which they did not understand.

The language was generally not mysterious and incomprehensible. They most certainly understood the words which they used. What they did not comprehend was the *meaning* and *purpose* of those words.

Many years later, the Apostle Peter was inspired by the Spirit to make clear, to those called for the purpose of understanding, the meaning of this hidden knowledge. Peter wrote:

. . . of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched [what? the written word] diligently, who [the prophets themselves] prophesied [uttered and also recorded the very messages which God had delivered to them] of the grace *that should come unto you*. Searching [reading and studying] what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom [prophets] it was revealed [a very limited revelation], that not unto themselves, but unto us [those in God's appointed time who were called to the grace of salvation] they [prophets] did minister [speak, record,

deliver] the things which are now reported [spoken because God had revealed them] unto you by them that have preached the gospel . . . (1 Pet. 1:10–12).

Even the prophets of old, called of God to perform a special function, did *not* understand the words which had been given to them. How much less those in complete darkness—pursuing the ways of human existence which come to them naturally?

The words of God have been written, but reading them (even diligently studying them) does not grant understanding. By the decree of God, they were hidden until revealed in His appointed time and then to those only whom He called to understand.

It is no different today! Reading the Bible—the recorded words of God—does not of itself result in spiritual understanding.

The prophet Daniel was made acutely aware of this fact. What God had delivered to him, he was required to record. But the understanding of what he had written was denied (Dan. 12:9). If reading and studying were the only requirements to understanding, why did not Daniel simply review what he had written?

From yet another perspective we can grasp this same cardinal principle. Let us ask, Who will understand? Who will not?

Daniel makes this point very clear! In Daniel 12:10 we read: "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." Two classes of people are specifically identified—the wicked and the wise. The one group—the wicked—will not understand. The other—the wise—will comprehend. The source material is the same in both cases. Both read it. Only one understands. It is obvious, reading does not equal understanding. Bible comprehension can come by revelation only.

The Apostle John carefully differentiates between the two—the wicked and the wise. He wrote:

. . . we [Christians] *KNOW* that we are of God, and the whole world [generally speaking—all people] lieth in wickedness—[those who will not understand]. And we know that the son of God is come, and *hath given us* [the called, chosen—the wise] an understanding, that we may *KNOW* him [Christ] that is true. . . . This is the true God, and eternal life (1 John 5:19–20).

Two things John knew and recorded. First, the whole world lieth in wickedness. Second, only the wise—the called—knew Christ and were given an understanding of what it is all about.

The Bible is the written Word of God. A mere reading of (or even studying) it *does not* constitute understanding. For understanding is given by God. And it is given to those only whom God calls. That understanding in every practical sense can be termed a *second* revelation. It can best be illustrated by the living example of Jesus Christ Himself. He was the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14). Yet, He was not known, accepted or understood by any except those called and those to whom God the Father revealed Him. In comparable fashion, the world has the written Word, the Bible—incredibly proliferated—yet the vast majority does not understand. Possession of and the reading of the Word of God does not bring understanding any more than *seeing* Christ constituted KNOWING Him.

The initial revelation of the Word of God culminated in the recording of it through the prophets, Christ and the apostles. But before a true spiritual understanding can be realized, a divine call and *second* revelation must occur. This second revelation *always* occurs at the time of the call—the call to *specific individuals*.

Many today delude themselves into pursuing whatever they think is right based on what they believe the Bible says, by limiting the revelation of Truth to that which was given in Christ's day. They believe that by simply reading the New Testament they can understand all spiritual things. How do they explain the historical fact that a *mere handful only* understood the Truth proclaimed by the living Christ Himself?

The Bible clearly indicates, the world is in total darkness *until the Truth is revealed*. That fact is as valid today as it was at any given historical time.

The Truth (knowledge of Christ) must be revealed—a second revelation. It is the *spiritual* revealing of what was previously recorded in the written Word—the Bible.

How has God hidden His Word from the beginning? Why cannot people of themselves comprehend the written Word of God?

Why People Cannot Comprehend the Written Word of God

Shocking though it may seem, God arranged the contents of His Word so that it could *not* be understood. Further, the very design of the Word is to conceal the meaning and allow for both assumption and presumption by those who claim "interpretative" capability (Isa. 28:9–13).

If God had wanted His Word (the Truth) known by all, He would not have deliberately and intentionally hidden the meaning from the foundation of the world (Rom. 16:25–26 and Eph. 3:9). The very fact the Word was hidden—though it had long been written and read by men—indicates design and purpose. Indeed! To understand, God must *call* and *reveal* His intended meaning—the spiritual intent and purpose—that which can be comprehended by a spiritual mind only.

Men cannot understand and obey the Truth of God, because He arranged His Word to conceal the real meaning. Until God makes the spiritual intent known, those who arrogate interpretative capability only deceive themselves. The consequence of such presumption must be paid. This is what God inspired Isaiah to write. The result is the maze of confusion in evidence today.

Old Testament Obedience Did Not Constitute Spiritual Obedience

God *gave* His Law and way of life to His chosen people Israel. They were the custodians (Rom. 3:2; 1 Cor. 10:11; 1 Pet. 1:12). But they could not obey it (Deut. 5:29; Joshua 24:14–25; Heb. 4:2). Why? The Israelites, the chosen people of God, were born of the flesh. They were natural, carnal human beings. Flesh cannot obey God.

At the appointed time Christ came. He was the Word made flesh (John 1:1, 14). He lived the spiritual intent of the Law and way of life. By His life and death we can have the forgiveness of sin—violation of that way—and the opportunity to have dwelling within us the Spirit of *obedience*. Jesus said:

. . . the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth (John 4:23–24).

The words of life had long ago been written. But only after the appearance of Jesus was spiritual obedience possible. It is obvious, then, reading the recorded Word of God does not make the Truth known or obedience possible.

This concept is substantiated by the fact the disciples were called to understand—to **KNOW** the Truth. Those called of God **KNOW** the Truth. All others merely do what they *think* (believe) to be the Truth.

Jesus stated emphatically that His called disciples were *chosen to understand the Truth* (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10). About their call and the knowledge they received, there was no equivocation (1 John 4:6). The mystery had been *given to them* (1 John 1:1–3).

If the disciples were *called to understand*, will circumstances be any different for those human beings called of God subsequent to their time?

The answers will come in subsequent issues of the *Monthly Letter*.

Once again, space dictates a conclusion to this letter—our marvelous opportunity of entering your home. Thank you for your loyalty and faithfulness. Our prayers and thoughts are with you daily. We do so much love you and admire your conviction and purpose. May your courage never weaken.

Until next time, may we convey all our genuine and fraternal feelings of respect and kindness.

With much love,

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

Raymond C. Cole