

Church of God, The Eternal

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Who Are the Approved of God?—Part I

August 1992

Dear Brethren:

Unique to human beings is an innate desire to serve something outside of the self. By whatever term it is designated linguistically or conceptually, its common denominator is "religion." Man *is* religious. He worships that which is called "god"—as long as he has the prerogative of determining what that "god" requires as a matter of obedience, or belief, for entrance into the ultimate utopian state. He "accepts" a roster of beliefs, but seldom ever really lives up the standard of "righteousness" which he determines for himself.

Does his religious inclination automatically establish him as a genuine, true, honest servant of God? Are all people who profess "religion" religious? Are they a part of the truth? If the truth is a way of life espoused by God, how can the many differing ways taught be a part of the one way given by God? Is not God One? And His way—truth—one?

From where do all the present-day religious concepts of the world come? Christianity is not even numerically a major religion of the world. How do we know that the premise of Christianity is genuine? If it is, why are there so many differing groups all claiming to be a part of the "real" Christian concept? Does not the Bible specifically indicate that Christ—the body—is one? Are not Christ and His doctrine one? How do the many differing religions of the world fit into the picture? What is the relationship between them and that which is called Christianity?

The above picture becomes even more murky when one considers the manifold doctrinal changes and splits which have occurred within the rank and file of "Christianity." If God is One and His way immutable—unchangeable—what do the above changes and splits infer? These are serious and far-reaching questions. They deserve and must be given genuine and honest answers.

Just who is God? Is there more than one God? What is truth? Is there more than one way of life? Do people of the world have the right to make their own personal choices about how they elect to serve their god? Is God fundamentally indifferent to the concepts of belief—requiring only that He be addressed as God?

Out of this maze of conflicting beliefs and practices, are there any who really serve God? If so, just who are the approved of God?

Three Broad Classes of People Populate the Earth

Claims are legion. But man is a notorious deceiver. Can we trust any of his claims? Emotional claims are woefully lacking in any form of proof or substantiation. There must be evidence, proof, in some way which earmarks the called and faithful. At the same time, all other claims are marked by the fact that they do not fall into the classification of the chosen of God.

A clear understanding of the words of God technically reveals the broad categories of all humanity. No other instruction affords a clear and understandable picture of these beginnings and divisions. All "great" religions of the world are by their very nature philosophical. In other words, they are the creations of human minds. They lack the clear perspective of substance and origin. They do not, neither can they, explain the past in terms of creation—the creation of all things. They do not explain the beginnings of race, religion, nations, and a host of other substantive requirements.

Long-range and fulfilled prophecies verify the source and authenticity of the Bible. Interestingly, the Bible further reveals the source and causes of the multiple divisions which have occurred in the organizational structure of all humanity. Men come from a common ancestry (Acts 17:26). Created initially, and subsequently born, of flesh they are by nature opposed to anything but that of their own fleshly mind (Rom. 8:7; Eph. 2:1–3; Rom. 8:20). By nature they are right in their own eyes (Prov. 16:2).

The first broad category of humanity, initially encompassing the total of the human race, is that of the fleshly world—the whole of this physical world. These are the uncalled, those born of the flesh, unmindful of God, yet possessing an emotional and intuitive orientation toward religion—a desire to honor something outside of the self. These are the ones who literally have lived just as the God of the Bible foretold (see Deut. 4:19). They have created religions based on the physical world—the premise of the heart and mind of the flesh.

In the process of time, as God wills, specific human beings are called (John 6:44–45, 64–65). That call is imperative and absolute (Rom. 11:29). It is a call tendered by God only (Heb. 3:1). How? (2 Thess. 2:14–15) Why? (2 Tim. 1:9) What are the purposes for that call? (Matt. 11:25–27; Rom. 8:28–30) And, finally, what responsibility is borne by those called? (2 Pet. 1:10).

From the above it is obvious that God at the time of a call makes essential knowledge available (John 17:1–5; Matt. 11:25–27). The call is absolute; but the level of conversion, individually, is dependent upon personal orientation, emotional stability, and character (Matt. 13:1–23). From those called it seems, tragically, that only a small number numerically can remain faithful to that call. The justifications personally advanced for change, rejection of the way totally, or weaknesses—manifested in various forms of vacillation, failure to fervently obey, and just plain indifference—are myriad. And as we shall see, later, departure from the revealed truth does not mean a rejection of "religion." On the contrary, since man is both always right in his own eyes and "naturally" religious, he seeks out a group or organization—or if necessary creates his own association—which will agree with his own philosophical tenets.

At this juncture it is plain: There are two distinct groups of human beings which exist on this earth. Initially, there is the total mass of humanity, uncalled, living according to the dictates of their own wills. Then, as God moves to fulfill His promises, another class of humanity surfaces—those called to know the truth and the way of life delivered. (Ancient Israel does not fall into this second class. Though God dealt with them, they remained a part of the fleshly world and were expected to obey physically only. Historically they existed as a type of the spiritual only). From where does the third class come? Since the initial class encompasses all the world, prior to call, it is obvious that this final category of humanity must come from those called. How? What happens?

They are the apostate. Those who departed from the truth given to them. Tragically, they form a much larger group than the faithful. The faithful—the remnant—are classified as the "few who find it"—those who remain faithful to that to which they were called.

All Remain Religious

Despite the natural antagonism toward the concept of God, even the humanists—most often the elite of the world—pursue one of the most virulent forms of religion. For, humanism is a religion. These worship the physical. Their god is a god of flesh. It is but a part of the universal worldly religion granted by the God of the universe (Deut. 4:19). It is a part of the way which seems right to men (Prov. 16:2, 25). Even more specifically, it is a part of the religious way of the entire world—the worship of an unseen god, a god who has had influence over the entirety of the human masses (Compare Rev. 12:9 and Luke 4:4–7). Though the deceived may not know it, that deception was promulgated through the very means God chose to teach and instruct His own chosen servants—a ministry (2 Cor. 11:14–15). The historical type, the nation of Israel, changed the truth given to them and began serving the created instead of the living Creator (Rom. 1:21–25). Serving that which seems right to man began under the influence of the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) at the very beginning (Gen. 3:6–7). Eve merely did that which seemed right to her. To this very

day man continues to do the same thing. It is an influence even those called of God must resist daily (2 Tim. 2:25–26).

Regardless of the brand of religion, the common father of all religions outside of the single body (1 Cor. 12:12–14) to whom the truth was given, is none other than Satan, the devil (John 8:44). He is the god accepted by Adam and Eve and continues to practice his deceptions unto this day. He is the archenemy of even the called of God. They must be on guard daily. The easiest thing in the world is to pursue that which seems right to man, that which is right in our own minds (2 Cor. 4:3–5). Change is the hallmark of Israelites (Jer. 2:11–13). Since physical Israel—Israel of the flesh—is the type of spiritual Israel today it, therefore, becomes evident that change is the principle practice of those called to know the truth and whom God holds accountable for continuity of faith and belief.

Since the purpose undertaken in this letter is to determine those approved of God, let us see if we can find common denominator classifications of both those approved and those rejected. By so doing we can be assured that our faith is either foundational or foundationless.

The Premise of World Religions

The premise of human religion is multi-faceted. That is, there are many manifestations though the premise itself is singular. That premise is the foundation upon which the religions of the world stand, including that of those who departed from the truth—the apostate ones.

What are some of the more obvious and significant manifestations?

Right in One's Own Sight

First, the vehement defense of the self—that which is right in the eyes of the individual. From the beginning man has pursued that way (Gen. 3:6–7). In the time of the formation of the nation of Israel God warned, through Moses, His servant, against the pursuit of that way which seems right to individuals (Deut. 12:8). Yet, Israel seemed to have little difficulty avoiding the pursuit of that self-styled way (Judges 17:6; 21:25). In fact, that way seems to retain its effective control over many even in the last days (2 Pet. 2:15). Such a possibility is not inconceivable when we have understood the truth, yet fail to manifest requisite faith and perseverance against the natural inclinations of the flesh (Prov. 12:15; 14:12; 16:2, 25; 21:2). Only by the persistence of faith can such a fate be avoided. Even when called of God and knowledgeable of that perfect way of life, man has difficulty remaining faithful and obedient to the way revealed. Therefore, simply by

asserting one's belief that he is right does not give any guarantee that his conviction is honest and right in the sight of God. All the world, regardless of conviction and belief, is pursuing that way which seems right to them.

Appropriation of Office and Responsibility

Second, if through fervent and far-reaching deception Satan has become the god of the whole world (2 Cor. 4:4), it surely stands to reason that he must have developed some system by which he not only initially deceives but continues to inspire and mislead those who are his prey. Indeed, this is exactly what he has done. Paul tells us that the presence of a divergent ministry is no astounding or startling event because Satan, the god they serve, is himself a perverted transformation—giving the appearance of being exactly the opposite of his real and true motivation (2 Cor. 11:14–15). These ministers leave the impression of being genuine and true servants of the One and only true God. They claim for themselves righteousness and genuineness. This is possible because spiritual things are not seen—acting only invisibly, albeit miraculously, on the heart and mind. Therefore, since men cannot read hearts and/or minds, deception is possible. Who can challenge them?

These false ministers not only teach a perverse doctrine and way of living but also have assumed prophetic capability. They have in the past and continue presently to interpret prophecies (2 Pet. 1:20–21). Clearly, if God does not make known the intent of the prophetic words recorded, no man can know the true meaning. At best, any such "prophet" is guessing and thereby deceives many.

Prophecy as well as the whole of God's Word will remain a mystery to all with the exception of those called and to whom God makes the meaning known. Of further interest is the fact that only the called will know that they know the truth and have confidence in their call and revelation. Others who presume to know and understand will evidence contempt and disdain for those truly called and informed. However, it must be understood that the "uncalled" or those going into apostasy do not avoid Biblical assertions and proclamations. They will both presume understanding and demand the "right" to proclaim their version of perversion and understanding—both prophetic and the whole of God's Word in general (2 Pet. 2:1–3).

The perversions of the last days are not unique. Israel of old was consistently beset with those who assumed to speak for God. For that reason God instituted a means of testing all—both true and perverse (Deut. 18:15–22).

In the last days a true revelation from God will cause considerable embarrassment for those who have presumed prophetic capability and have caused many to trust in their messages (Jer. 14:14; 23:1–32; 27:15; 29:9, 31–32; Ezek. 13:1–16). They will be exposed and their true foundations discovered. The fury of God will befall the presumptuous.

Considering the above, what is apparent, taken in the context of the whole, is this fact: In the last days, our very own days, many have assumed prophetic responsibility even though God did not directly speak to them or commission them to go to the people with their message. Of further interest is the fact that the people themselves want to hear perverted things (Isa. 30:1–2, 8–13). Verse eight shows this prophecy to relate to the last days.

From that body which once knew and understood the revealed truth, many diverse groups sprang. Concepts and beliefs are as diverse as the groups themselves. Obviously there is much assumption in the name of God. Who, then, are the approved of God?

Appropriation of the Names of God and Christ

Third, Lucifer was created an angel. But, he appropriated the name of God. He, through deception, has become the god of this world (2 Cor. 11:14; 4:4; Luke 4:5–7). He attempted to gain the worship of Jesus Christ. In a comparable manner he has sought and gained the worship of nearly all of humanity. They do not call him Satan. He is called god, the god the whole world worships.

Is there any reason to believe that the people whom Satan has influenced are knowledgeable of the true God and that by merely appropriating the name of God that they are then truly worshipping Him? Indeed, no! The people of the nation of Israel were called to know God. Many times God said, "I am the Lord thy God, the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." But did Israel remember the true God? Israel was warned many times not to turn from their God to a god that they did not know (Jer. 7:6). The warning fell on deaf ears. The people of Israel created a plethora of gods (Jer. 11:10–13; Hosea 3:1). Yet, technically, they still called their created god by the Hebrew name for God. Israel was unaware of the fruitlessness of worshipping their own created gods until they found themselves in severe trials (Jer. 2:28). Until the time of that revelation the people stoutly defended their gods and the beliefs which they associated with the worship of those gods.

What about the time of Jesus Christ and the apostles—the time during which they performed their work here on earth? Was there a similar appropriation of name, but a total rejection of the doctrine and way of life?

The name of Jesus Christ is the only name in which is found everlasting life (Acts 4:12). If Satan is a purposeful deceiver, surely he did not let such a situation bypass him. He did not! For, just before His ascension into heaven, Christ warned of perilous and severe deception. Many would appropriate the name of Christ but would be the purveyors of deceit (Matt. 24:5; Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8). Therefore, the mere use of the names of God and Christ as well as personal claims of being a servant of God are insufficient evidence to verify any call and commission. In the Apostle Paul's day he tells us there were many gods proclaimed,

but only One true and faithful God (1 Cor. 8:5). He even wrote to Timothy explaining that all who use the name of God are not obedient (2 Tim. 2:19). Could it be that these were the same gods being preached to the church at Corinth? (2 Cor. 11:4) They were different Christs from the One Paul had seen and was teaching wherever his travels took him.

These many and different gods are still being worshipped and proclaimed in these last days (Matt. 24:5; 7:22). These many gods are the gods of human design (Hosea 14:3). We are told that obedience to these many gods blasphemes the true God (Rom. 2:24).

Pious use of the names of God and Christ are not a proof of authenticity. Again, we need to ask: Is it possible to know who the approved of God are?

Argumentation

Fourth, Paul was inspired to list many of the manifestations of flesh. Among these perverse traits one can find listed the tendency to argue, debate, or otherwise enter into contention relevant to doctrine and other spiritual concepts. These traits may be a manifestation of something but most assuredly, they are not a manifestation of faith and trust in God. They are not of the Spirit.

Argument accomplishes nothing (Job 6:25). By its very nature, argument cannot produce good results. It is a manifestation of human arrogance and the universal belief, individually, that a man is right in his own personal opinions. It proceeds only from the foolish (Job 23:4).

Considering the matter of argumentation as it relates to New Testament times and these closing times of the last days it is a comprehensive indication of the faithless—those who were called but could not remain faithful to the originally revealed truth.

Involving oneself in argument is a living proof of an apostate mind (Titus 1:7–11)—an act in which the faithful will not indulge. The most that can be said for it is this: It will destroy faith and the conviction of those who are weak and allow themselves to be dissuaded from the way to which they were called. To subscribe to argument is living evidence of a foundationless belief and conviction (1 Tim. 1:4–7), as well as the evidence of change and a rejection of divinely revealed truth (2 Tim. 3:1, 5–8). It stems from vanity and perversion of mind (compare 1 Tim. 6:3–5 and 2 Cor. 10:3–5). It is a cardinal manifestation of self-deception (2 Tim. 3:13–14; Titus 3:9–11). Though it is not realized by human beings, the real source of argumentation, debate and contention is not the flesh but an unseen power which exerts a powerful influence on the mind and heart of human beings led by the arrogance of their own vanity (2 Tim. 2:23–26; 1 Tim. 4:1, 6–7). Intriguingly,

Satan's appeal to man is a trait or characteristic little recognized or realized—the desire to establish a religious orientation which caters to our own perverted and deceptive minds (2 Tim. 4:3–4).

Called human beings are destined for failure unless they recognize the basic requirements of salvation: faith and continuity—which God will under specific circumstance try (2 Thess. 2:10–12). The stakes involved in salvation are high. The proof God requires is our intent to resist perversion, change, compromise—even to the point of death.

Argumentation and capable skills in debate are not evidence of God's approval. But they are manifestations of faithlessness. Again we ask, who then are the approved of God?

Division

Fifth, it follows that if argumentation is a basic characteristic of apostasy, contention, change, and self-seeking, its sister would be division. Each man will stoutly maintain his own orientation. He believes, yes, knows, that he is right. All men are right in their own eyes.

Division surfaced even among the people of Israel (2 Pet. 2:1). Though God had given His way of life through most unusual circumstances to the Israelites they did not continue in the way given. They were eager to pursue the way which seemed right to them. Undoubtedly the prophets who presumed to speak for God thought they were right. Most people do not act in a knowing volatile and hateful manner. They think they are right in whatever direction they give to their lives.

Division was no stranger to Christ. He was at the very heart of many contentions. Who was this person called Christ? (John 7:43). People could not agree in interpreting His actions (John 9:16). Events which were destined to occur in His life were a primary source of contention (John 10:19). Until the natural nature of man is changed man is destined to live in the midst of contention and strife. It is a part of man's makeup.

Divisions were rampant in the church during the days of the apostles. The Apostle Paul constantly fought the tendency for members to individualize. To the members at Corinth he wrote: "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions [factions], are ye not carnal, and walk as men." (1 Cor. 3:3). Division, self-assertiveness, is natural to man. Therefore the manifestation of this trait is sufficient evidence that the Corinthians were yet carnal. They were merely walking as men. Just a few chapters later, Paul emphasized the condition existing in Corinth. He had been given reports of divisions (sects) actively existing in the church (1 Cor. 11:18, first part of verse). In fact, by the time of the twilight years of the Apostle John, we are told that a host of

sectarian groups had formed—all feeding on the vestiges of the former corporate body of the church (1 John 4:1).

Since the whole of God's Word is written for the called of these last days, it is abundantly clear that strife and divisions would exist in our own day. In referring to these last days, Christ foretold of the appropriation of His name and an aggressive campaign by imposters to deceive the called and elect (Matt. 24:5). In like manner, from the context of Peter's writings, he warns us that many presumptuous men would play havoc with the faith and conviction of the called (2 Pet. 2:1–3). In the last days far too many will begin to espouse false prophetic concepts to which we are warned to pay no heed (Matt. 24:23–26; Luke 17:22–23). The called are warned not to be mesmerized by new and daring concepts. Faith is anchored in firm belief and resolve regarding the truth revealed. The new and daring are calculated deceptions.

Causes of Divisions:

All recognize the fact that strife, division and contention are manifestations (fruits, works) of the flesh. Yet, it is equally clear that there must exist philosophical premises for the carnal divisions manifested. What are these philosophical bases?

Though the name of Christ has been appropriated, it seems that the most far-reaching divisive concept relates to who and what Christ is. That particular issue was a sore point to most throughout the time of His own ministry (John 7:40–44). Private and group interpretation of what is right and wrong was, and is, a basic cause (John 9:16). Christ's concept of exclusivity was bitterly contended by those who desired acceptance (John 10:14–19). The actual fulfillment of last day prophecies will in themselves be a point of contention (Luke 17:22–23). Even many of those called to know Christ and the truth will be dissuaded by those who have turned to their own concepts and are influencing others to follow them (2 Pet. 2:1–3). From a very basic level of comprehension, though the name of God and Christ have been appropriated, the beliefs and practices of all but the one body to whom the truth was given have rejected Christ (1 Cor. 12:3). The significance of that statement is thoroughly explained in the entirety of the twelfth chapter. What is the context? The body is one—one only. It is a body established by the will and purpose of God. Men do not choose to become a part. They are inducted by Christ only and always in the responsibilities as determined by Him. We are made a partaker of Christ only if the Holy Spirit resides within us. The acid test therefore is found in the confession of that Spirit (1 John 4:1–3). Do we confess the living presence (how we live physically) of Christ (Eph. 5:30). There is a single (Christ had one body only) physical body which is the body of Christ in these last days—as was true throughout this earlier era of time.

Divisions occur because men have appropriated the names of God and Christ but have insisted on the right of private interpretation—believing that which "seems" right to them. Division is a significant manifestation of carnality.

Unfortunately, the persuasive powers of those who have departed from the "once delivered truth" is great. The many of those once called to understand will turn to those perverse ways (Matt. 24:5). They find temporary satisfaction in pursuing that way which seems right to them. Terrible regret and sorrow is to be faced in the future, however.

When Christ lived on earth in His own physical body, the constant objective of the god of this world, Satan, was to deceive Christ and to turn Him from the worship of the One true God to the worship of himself (Luke 4:1–8). Should it seem strange that he continues to dissuade those called to compose the continuation of the Body of Christ—the church? The very nature of Satan, and of human beings, is divisive. Satan and his ministers uphold the concept of individuality. Then in a clever about-face, he induces human beings to seek unity and accord under his control (study the context and purpose of Luke 11:14–26). Always, however, the concepts of peace and unity are elusive because the basic nature of both man and Satan is divisive. Oneness and accord are manifestations of a different Spirit.

The result of this innate divisiveness is a host of individualized groups all claiming to be the one, or in some cases a part of the One, Body of Christ. For those called to really hear and know the truth, the wife of Christ is singular. It is not composed of many bodies all claiming to be a part of the one true group. Therefore, to become a part of any group which is not faithful to the initial call is a manifestation of harlotry (1 Cor. 6:15–17). Such a relationship is simply not acceptable to God. Why, it must be asked, would a true, faithful, and merciful God allow His called and chosen to experience so many severe and trying circumstances?

Why does God allow these tests?

The Apostle John emphasizes the necessity of carefully testing every one who comes claiming to be a servant of God (1 John 4:1–3). John lays down precise means by which the test can be administered. The premise of that test—since all concepts require a basis of evaluation—is the "faith once delivered" (Jude 3). In fact God Himself plays a critical part in the testing process (2 Thess. 2:9–12). The reasons become obvious. Satan, the god of this world, at one time himself held awesome responsibility and position. As the called and chosen of God are to inherit the promised kingdom, God will not allow anyone to assume position or responsibility who cannot remain faithful. It is in this context that a statement of the Apostle Paul takes on great and significant meaning. In 1 Cor. 11:18–19 Paul states emphatically that sectarian (see margin) departures from the truth are inevitable. Short of such a test how would God know of our determined purpose to remain faithful and consistent?

Though there are two more manifestations of those who exist outside of the body of faith, space constraints dictate the necessity of closing now. Not only these remaining two concepts, but also the manifestations of those who are approved of God as well as

concluding principles, will be addressed in a future *Letter*. It will be necessary for you to keep this *Letter* handy so that you can easily connect it to the completion of the above subject.

One final note: The intense study and analysis of the material contained in these letters will be in vain unless you all take the time to really study and pray about the contents and make them a part of your mental orientation. For us individually, the time is short. It may be much closer than we realize. Let us all redeem the time God has allotted for our personal mastery.

Our love and prayers are always for and with you—daily.

With deepest love and affection,

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