

Church of God, The Eternal

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The Seven Ways by Which People Form Their Beliefs

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Dear Brethren:

For those whose minds have been given a spiritual orientation, conditions of the world today are frightening. It can be fairly accurately and confidently stated, we are now on the cutting edge of the climactic events of the last days. For the observant, many prophesied events are occurring with ever-increasing and severe rapidity. Is there an area of this globe which is not experiencing many of the difficulties indicated for the closing days of this era of time? We know of none. Strife, war and bloodshed, racial violence, social decay, mental aberrations of many human beings, unbelievable diseases and mass epidemics, governmental rot, and a general "me-first" attitude are rampant. How much worse can it become in some areas of this world? What has happened in "far-off" places in times past is destined to happen to our own nations and peoples, soon.

It is in just such conditions and under such circumstances that deceivers and the self-styled can and do most effectively work. In most areas of business the word of anyone is suspect. No one believes in the honesty and integrity of another mortal, and for good reason. Considering the manifold ways by which families and individuals can circumvent economic responsibility, is it any wonder that man's word is considered useless? Who in his right mind would believe another man? Rationalizations and justifications for actions taken or not taken are endless.

How has this spirit and orientation affected the arena of religion? Would anyone deign employ the serious domain of religion to gain advantage over others or to market the self? Is it possible that out of the crucible of the last-day body, which was called and commissioned by God, would come into vogue a host of divergent and erroneous concepts broadly accepted by a host of diverse, confused, and bewildered members who are left with no sure anchor or apparent means of making requisite and acceptable decisions?

What is plainly observable is this: From the one body in which we all began our spiritual existence just a few short years ago, there has come a relatively large number of churches—all claiming to preach the true word of God and to be a part of the divine commission to preach the gospel in the last days. Why are there so many groups? They all disagree doctrinally, or for some other more subtle reasons. To echo the Apostle Paul in his

day, "Is Christ divided?" If Christ possessed a single mind and the way of life is singular, how can they all be right? There is something wrong. As thinking individuals are we capable of honestly and rightly evaluating the situation and coming to acceptable spiritual conclusions?

Underlying the above problem is one imperative question which we all must address and answer honestly. It is: How did we come to our present convictions? By whatever process we came to our conclusions, we need to understand *that* orientation is where our faith and trust reside. Once we understand that orientation and admit it honestly, we, then, must address the next issue which is of equal importance: Is our premise of acceptance and trust acceptable in the sight of God?

From our analysis of the subject, there seem to be at least seven basic ways by which most people come to their conclusions. Of course, all are going to claim their brand of doctrine and belief structure came from the Bible. A claim is worthless, however, unless supported by fact—spiritual fact, not physical fact.

Trust in One's Own Intellect

First, a very large number of people, perhaps the largest group of all, stubbornly defend the prowess and capability of their own intellect. In their minds they came to their belief structures based on their own personalized study of the Bible. They quote a number of different texts, with emphasis on Acts 17:10–11 and 2 Timothy 2:15. But, is it possible for one to come to the knowledge of God's way of life solely by personal study? Let us see.

The Apostle Paul mentioned a group who were energetically applying themselves to personal study. Were they able to arrive at sound conclusions? He said they were, "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). Why? Paul explains, ". . . these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith" (v. 8). Their personal study was not helping them in the least. To the Corinthians, at an earlier date, the Apostle Paul said, "Casting down imaginations [reasonings], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). If that is not an apt description of reliance upon personal study, please tell us what it is. From this text we are informed that the truth was first given, then, at a later date the human mind demanded the right to reason and evaluate that which was given. Such tendencies must be resisted with faith and conviction—trusting that which was originally delivered. Although there are many texts which could be given, let us limit our evaluation to one more. Regarding the last day problems, Paul wrote to the evangelist Timothy the following:

Preach the word. . . . For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine: but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables (2 Tim. 4:2–4).

Here, once again, the spiritual mind is made aware that the truth had been given already. But some had (or will have) no confidence in that which was given them. Not enduring sound doctrine simply means faith in the given truth would be shattered. The result? According to the dictates of the natural minds these people with shattered faith turned to their own minds—trusting their own study—and would turn away from the given knowledge, accepting the fables generated in their own minds or in the minds of others.

From the above texts we can be sure of these facts: 1. In the last days the true doctrine was given and the called responded to it. 2. Many could not endure the test of faith by remaining obediently loyal to the way given. 3. Those who departed were turning to ministers, either ordained or self-appointed, who would preach that which was humanly acceptable—stemming from personalized study of the Scriptures. 4. Their concepts are called, by God, fables (legends, myths, stories, tales).

Trust in Scholars

The second avenue by which certain human beings have arrived at their convictions and are "sure" they have come to the real knowledge of the truth is that of intensive research. To them the genuine truth of God is to be found in the pages of books written by the learned and erudite of this world. These people gather around themselves the works of great and recognized scholars. Through much exhaustive study and research they come to their convictions and are assured of their premise. Can those so oriented come to a true knowledge of the one and only way of life? Is truth to be found in the pages of books written by men of great learning and capability? Are not these "greats" a part of the wise of this world? Are spiritual things seen and understood short of some miraculous intervention on the part of God?

The Apostle Paul had to address this issue in a comparable manner to that which we face today. To the Corinthians he wrote: "For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). The God of the Old Testament was the One who became Christ. He said that He was the truth and the way (John 14:6). Is it possible to know the truth and yet not know the One who personifies that truth? Of course not. Therefore, the world cannot know spiritual truth by wisdom or by any other powers of the human mind. Spiritual truth does not come via such means. What we see, however, is that by the means of science, erudition, and carnal learning, spiritual truth is rejected and set aside. Paul wrote to Timothy:

. . . keep that which is committed to thy trust [by whatever means it was originally given] avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called (1 Tim. 6:20).

Education all too frequently destroys confidence in the spiritual; it does not support or assist as so many are wont to believe. Education is of itself not bad. Study, likewise, of itself is not bad. However, the truth of God neither comes by education nor by research.

More about that later.

By Birthright

The third avenue by which some have come to their convictions is at one and the same time a disturbing problem in an area of subtle hypocrisy. Far too many of those who were called to know the truth over the years somehow came to believe their children were automatically born into the truth. Physical birth is of the flesh. Every child born is carnal and will remain carnal until God calls and changes the nature within him. During the time of confusion and bewilderment generated because of the departure from truth initiated in the years of 1972–1974, many of the called did not make intelligent decisions based on faith and conviction. Rather those decisions were made on the premise of what father and mother or children did or were planning to do.

Family Unity

The desire was to keep the family intact. This may be classed as a fourth avenue. In the name of common sense how does one equate pursuing the unalterable truth with keeping a family intact? When considered in perspective, all attempts to structure a family according to carnal desires, whether by lateral moves or compromising belief, are manifestations of carnality. They are not manifestations of faithfulness to a given way of life. The called have been designated from the foundation of the world. That call has little to do with any particular physical circumstance of this life. God calls according to the rule of His own choosing. One is not born into the truth any more than another is found to be pursuing the truth by simply following father, mother, or children during times of confusion and bewilderment. By physical birth, we are "sold under sin"—the pursuit of that which seems right to the natural mind (Rom. 7:14). Also, carnal relatives are a cause of much of the trouble experienced by the chosen of God (Matt. 10:21–22).

False Teachers

The fifth avenue by which some come to religious conclusions and have established their orientation in life is frequently a paradox in itself. These are those who are "never going to follow a man again." Yet for some mysterious reason they become enamored with men who themselves are negatively reacting to past experiences. Leaning toward the dictates of their own carnal minds they select teachers and concepts based on personal convictions, not Biblical truths. Paul wrote of this problem when he said, ". . . the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine: but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears (2 Tim. 4:3). Even more graphically, Peter said:

. . . there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies. And many shall follow their pernicious ways: by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of (2 Pet. 2:1–2).

How is it possible for self-appointed ministers to ensnare the minds of those who now deem themselves liberated? Note 2 Peter 2:18–19. Peter writes:

. . . they allure through the lusts of the flesh. . . . While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

These people who have determined to never follow a man again have turned to the worst enemy of all—their own carnal minds. They trust what conclusions *they* have come to and are looking for a man or organization which teaches that which is acceptable to them. Make no mistake about it, these people feel with strong conviction that their conclusions were directly derived from the Bible and that God had everything to do with them. What is apparent is this: One cannot accept as proof the conviction and belief of any human being. Divergent in belief and practice, all men believe their brands of "truth" come directly from the Bible—established by personal study, intensive research, or any of the other avenues by which human beings presume to have gained access to the Way of God.

Mystical Experiences

The sixth method by which some arrive at "truth" and believe themselves to be the called and specially selected servants of God is through some mysterious experience. Since most do not test such experiences, they are convinced in their own minds that they have had a direct contact with God. Such people fail to realize two things. First, every man wants to think of himself as being unique in the sight of God. Satan, knowing this tendency, has powerfully played on the minds and hearts of the gullible. Man of himself would be helpless in the presence of Satan or any of his cohorts, demons. These powers of the

spirit-world have gained control over all men, in some cases gaining outright possession of the bodies and minds of mortals. In other cases—the vast majority of men—they merely use mortals to their own advantage. Only those given divinely revealed truth are in a position to test such experiences. Without an appropriate standard, there is absolutely no way by which man can evaluate these personal experiences. He will accept as valid whatever of a mysterious nature occurs to him. Yet, the called of God are commanded by God, ". . . believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God. . ." (1 John 4:1). How do these mysterious and unseen spirits come to men? The Apostle John makes the answer to that question quite clear. He said, continuing in verse one, ". . . because many false prophets are gone out into the world." The Apostle Peter elaborates: ". . . there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you" (2 Peter 2:1). Clearly these spirits, demons, are dominating the minds and hearts of those who open themselves up to such influence and do not employ the only standard of judgment which God gave to His chosen children—the standard of the revealed truth. Christ warned of insidious trials—trials which all the chosen of God would experience in the last days. In Matthew 24:35 we are ominously informed, ". . . Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ; and shall deceive many." Obviously, no one can take at face value the claims of any man. How, then, is one to know the truth and sustain confidence in his call and the way of life which he pursues? These are not insignificant questions. The lives of those called are entirely dependent upon making the right decisions and following in the way of faith.

An experience, without the exercise of responsible testing based on the only yardstick given—the revealed truth—is of little value. More particularly, such experiences can be a detriment to men. Far too many will be induced, because of the mystery and miraculous nature of the experience itself, to accept whatever is espoused. Even those called of God can become the prey of such experiences. The Apostle Paul had to deal with a host of such problems (1 Cor. 14:23–40). Obviously, Satan and his demons are most interested in deceiving those called of God. Each one called of God is a threat to Satan. Most others, in one way or another, are already deceived and subject to his influence (Rev. 12:9; 13:14, 2 Cor. 4:4).

All experiences must be tested. Many will come not from the hands of God, but from the miraculous intervention of Satan and his demons. Therefore, a spiritual experience is not a proof of the divine action of God. By such experiences many, many people of the last days are going to be misled and then find themselves without the approbation and approval of God.

How sobering and emotionally upsetting to learn that what one had come to accept is both wrong and a manifestation of rebellion against the very One such an individual thought he was serving. For some, now is the time to test such experiences and make proper decisions. The yardstick is the revealed truth of God—that which was given to a servant chosen of God and commissioned to proclaim it in these last days.

Divine Revelation

The seventh and last avenue by which some have come to spiritual belief is that of divine revelation. These know the truth and are steadfast in their faith and conviction. They know that truth does not come by personal study or intensive Biblical research. At the time appointed of God, they heard the message proclaimed and were inspired by the active influence of the Holy Spirit to surrender their lives, to be baptized, and then by the receipt of the indwelling presence of that promised Spirit have crucified the self and put on the holy nature and character of God. Through the years, on many occasions, as they lived and practiced the truth given, they were tested and found it necessary to hold fast to the way taught.

The carnal mind is opposed to God (Rom. 8:7). It is not subject to the truths—ways—of God. Being flesh it is opposed to all things spiritual. It cannot find out spiritual things by its own scholastic ability. Spiritual things must be revealed. See and study carefully 1 Corinthians 2:9–14. Christ was the embodiment of spiritual things living in the flesh (John 1:1, 14; 14:6). The only way a man can know Christ is by divine revelation (Matt. 11:25–27). Since He is an unchanging manifestation of the revealed truth, when He lives in those chosen to partake of that same Spirit, they, too, will live an unchanging way of life. Of course, they must continually mortify the works of the flesh; but, the truth revealed will be unchanging.

Personal Conviction Not a Proof

The ways and claims of flesh are manifold. All men are right in their own sight (Prov. 16:2, 25). Claims of men regarding spiritual things are not proof of call, conversion, and obedience to truth. In fact, the only proofs Christ presented are spiritual in nature. He said that the proof of His own mission and the way of life He proclaimed was borne out by the works which He was sent to perform and the backing of the Father, both of which are spiritual in nature (John 5:36–38). Though spiritual things can be judged only by a spiritual mind (1 Cor. 2:15), there are specific factors which apply in the exercise of that grave responsibility. First, Christ is singular; He had but one mind. Second, the truth of God is singular. There is but one way of life. Third, since the church is the body of Christ, there is but one body which is true and genuine. Fourth, due to the influence of human nature and the motivation of Satan, an apostasy occurred in that singular body in the last days. Fifth, since the truth is eternal—it does not change—the faithful will be manifested by the fact they refuse to make any changes, at any time, with respect to doctrine and the way of life given to the chosen servant of the last days. Tragically, even the last day servant himself allowed the apostasy to occur.

The proofs are available. But, they are seen by the spiritually minded only. The day of separation will be most revealing. Is it possible for the called to maintain in faith and conviction their orientation established at the time of their call?

To understand let us succinctly review the orientation of the fleshly mind, the process of conversion, the direction of the Holy Spirit, and proofs of God's indwelling work in these last days.

The Natural Mind

The natural mind demands tangible evidence. It does not act willingly in the realm of spiritual things. Flesh is antagonistic to the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). It is this self-aggrandizing, partial, selfish, and contentious mind which demands recognition for its own abilities. That mind gives rise to all assumed pursuits of spiritual objectives as devised by men and heavily influenced by Satan and his demons. From Biblical evidence we are clearly informed that the carnal mind gives rise to rebellion, heresy, contention, and any other orientation contrary to divine revelation. It is any arrogant mind which refuses to be restricted or controlled (Rom. 8:20–21). In the final analysis, the first six avenues of orientation mentioned above are manifestations of the carnal mind. As such, by means of those six avenues, revealed truths are massaged, changed, altered, or outright rejected. All such changes are classified as essential changes and approved of God. The natural mind refuses to accept itself for what it really is. The first act of conversion is understanding and accepting that natural mind for what it is. It is antagonistic toward God and all things spiritual (Rom. 8:6–8).

Things of the Spirit

Spirit is not seen. Only physical manifestations are observable and therefore evidence and confirm that power's presence in the lives of human beings. The human brain now empowered by the Spirit of God is humble, contrite, self-effacing—manifesting no confidence in the flesh, either mind or body. Knowing the limits of the natural mind, the person so called and empowered accepts the miraculous intervention of God in the giving of a way of life—the truth, doctrine—otherwise inaccessible to him. He knows that truth came not on the basis of any aggressive act on his part. He, also, recognizes that the truth came through a servant called and commissioned to proclaim that way of life. His acceptance was on the basis of faith. That way was not scholastically, scientifically, or mathematically ascertained. The called mind, influenced by the unseen Spirit, responded to that which was heard by faith (Eph. 1:13). Once called and given the truth a major long-term duty presents itself. The carnal mind, in all its devious twists, must be resisted (2 Cor. 10:5). The only manifestation of the continuity of conversion and faithfulness is found in the unchanging doctrine.

The Apostasy

The apostasy of the last days did not commence in the 1980s. The tragic outward beginning occurred in 1972–1974. It has grown more severe and troubling over the years, from that date to the present. Of grave concern is the fact that now in the 1990s many are erroneously (deceptively) applying the concept of the apostasy to the doctrinal changes presently occurring in the parent organization—heresies which they should have understood in the 1970s. Many are now doing so for their own personal advantage. Why accept *anything* that went "off track" twenty years ago? For the most part what we are seeing today can be dubbed as an apostasy from the apostasy. When one is wrong he is wrong—period. The apostasy occurred before the chosen servant of the last days died (Matt. 24:42–51). Truth comes by revelation. God gave the truth to His chosen servant. It is now our duty to remain faithful to that revelation.

The living truth strikes at the very foundation of all which is inherently wrong. Orientations of the physical mind are not wrong because we have concluded them to be wrong. They are wrong because they are inherently wrong—wrong because they are of the flesh. As Christ—the living manifestation of the truth—was spurned and rejected, so will those who uncompromisingly adhere to that same unalterable truth in these last days. They will be held up to ridicule and rejection.

We did not write the concepts contained in the Bible. God did. Even from a "letter of the law" perspective the ways and practices of the religiously oriented cannot be substantiated. From either the "letter" or "spiritual" application of the principles of the Bible, let the real truths be substantiated. The false concepts of the mind of the flesh cannot stand the revealing power and purpose of the truth of God. It is logical. It is unalterable. It is miraculous and forever a source of confidence and assurance.

Will we all be found practicing that way of life? The decision is ours—a decision which will be tested daily. Only a "few" will endure. You can be a part of that few.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

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

Raymond C. Cole