

Church of God, The Eternal

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What Is the Purpose of the Written Word of God?—Part II

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Dear Brethren,

In the August *Monthly Letter* we addressed part of a larger subject: What is/are the purpose(s) for personal reading and studying of the written Word of God—the Bible? To comprehend this subject it is most imperative that a number of related issues be first analyzed and understood. The August issue addressed the matter of divine revelation—a means by which the truth of God was given, in every instance, from the time of Adam to the time of Jesus Christ and the apostles which followed Him.

It has become obvious that related components of the subject must first be covered and made clear. Without an understanding of these basics it is entirely possible to pervert the instructions related to this concept, just as perversion can occur regarding any other subject of which the foundational considerations are not properly understood. Any misunderstanding will invariably make the issue at hand cloudy and leave too many flaws whereby the contentious can challenge, dissuade, and create confusion in the minds of the unsuspecting. For your own good, please carefully study the entire subject. It is both fascinating and rewarding. A real understanding is the hallmark of true and genuine spiritual orientation of mind—the comprehension promised to those called to become the recipients of the Holy Spirit.

The segments of the subject yet needing a thorough evaluation for your prayerful study are: What are the Scriptures—the Word of God? Do those Scriptures speak with authority? Who can understand the content and meaning of all or of any of those Scriptures? By what means is an understanding made possible? If only the called can understand spiritual things what happens when "presumers" attempt to explain and interpret those Scriptures? Was there a revelation in these last days? If so, who are the called and the recipients of that divine revelation? Is it possible for the spiritual mind to know and exist in absolute confidence? And finally, if knowledge came by divine revelation, what is the real purpose of individual Bible study?

At least a couple more *Monthly Letters* will be required to properly evaluate and explain these foundational concepts. Without a good understanding of these principles, most other Biblical subjects cannot be properly comprehended. It is our hope and prayer

that you will apply both heart and mind to the task at hand. That you will fully understand the concepts which have formed the basis of our "work" from the beginning. We are dedicated to the concept of continuity in that way of life and belief to which we all were called—including all those who have turned to changes and established a foundation based on their own self-determined doctrine and belief.

What Are the Scriptures?

There are many "sacred" books distributed among the people of the earth. Each refers to differing deities and a way by which all initiates must live. Since God is One and His way of life singular, there is only one truly sacred book. That book is the Bible. All other religions, and their sacred works, are but the fulfillment of an option granted by that One God to all peoples of the earth—with the exception of Israelites (Deut. 4:19).

The Scriptures are the words of God. They are the words which proceeded from the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4). They are the Words which existed at the very beginning (John 1:1). Moses was a principal in the preservation of the spoken words of God (Ex. 24:4; Deut. 31:24). The Scriptures are, in some part, a history of God's dealing with His chosen nation, Israel (Num. 33:2; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). They were included in a specific book (Deut. 28:58, 61; 29:20, 21, 27; 31:24). They are unchanging truth (Dan. 10:21). Spiritual in nature (John 6:63). Codified, in some part, and made a national law to Israel, that is, made a letter of the law responsibility (Psa. 78:5; Rom. 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:6). Manifested in and lived to perfection in the life of Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14). The Scriptures are the authoritative words of God. They speak in absolute terms. Though written by men, they are the living, spiritual words of the Father (2 Pet. 1:21).

The Book

Christ implied that the Bible (Old Testament) is divided into three general parts (Luke 24:44). The first is the law—implying the first five books of the Bible, the writings of Moses. The second is that part containing prophecies, the writings of the prophets.

These writings are the recording of specific messages given by God. The third section is that which is commonly called the writings.

The New Testament contains two sections. First, the teachings and actions of Christ. Second, the teachings and work of the apostles—initially the twelve and then followed by the Apostle Paul.

In all there are five basic sections to the complete Bible. All of those writings are parts of the Scriptures which are codified—the physical manifestation of that which is intrinsically spiritual. As Christ was made flesh, physically, so the very words of God, that which is inherently spiritual, were disclosed in the letter. That which we call a Bible is but a letter manifestation of that which exists in a higher state—the spiritual realm. Spiritual things are not seen. Physical manifestations are. Physical things can be destroyed. Spiritual things cannot. Burning all the Bibles which exist on this earth would in no way destroy the Word of God.

A fundamental and imperative concept regarding the authoritative nature of the Scriptures was stated by the Apostle Paul. He said, when writing to Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God . . ." (2 Tim. 3:16). Could there have been some contention about what was included in the Scripture? Or what Scriptures were still binding upon those called of God? What is known is this: Scripture is not the writing of men. Though men did the writing, the authority for and author of the complete Scriptures is God.

The Greek word for Scripture(s) is *graphee*. It simply means "the writings". A perusal of the English words "write, written, writing" will inform one of the Scriptures (writings) indicated.

The holy men of God were used to write His words, His laws, and His thoughts. They were disclosed in letter for the purpose of making them seen and available for natural minds and eyes. What larger purpose did God have for recording and preserving those writings over the centuries? In patience and diligent study we all shall understand.

Before addressing the real purposes for the written Word of God, let us take sufficient time to comprehend other basics requisite to a good understanding of the subject. For now we need to see and understand that Scriptures—the very Words of God—speak with authority, absoluteness. There is no margin of error. They are truth—all of them.

The Scriptures Speak Authoritatively

Jesus warned that no man should be deceived into believing that His coming in any way affected the legitimacy of the Scriptures. He said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17–18). Continuing in verse 20 Jesus emphatically states: ". . . except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." The scribes were the custodians of the written word. They had to understand the technicalities of language and intent in order to bear such a responsibility. Yet, holding such an office and duty did not help them to understand. It

takes more than adequate technical and physical understanding. Human understanding without inspiration was not possible. Those who bore physical responsibility and were technically astute tended to pervert, change, and alter the significance of what was really contained in the text. They manifested a physical form of righteousness. The true and faithful servant of God, however, must exceed any level of physical letter of the law obedience.

Let us note a few cases where those Scriptures spoke authoritatively, yet the carnal mind could not, or did not, comprehend. Remember, a mere claim of conversion is not sufficient. Only the fruits bear evidence. All people claim to be honorable and right in the sight of God. Obviously many are only deluding themselves.

Matthew 21:42 states: "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner . . ." Jesus was addressing a matter of understanding. They had read the Scriptures; but they had no understanding of what they were reading. In a classic parable approach, Jesus said that many would stumble at the Word (v. 44). Jesus was the stone; He, also, was the Word of God in the flesh. How many human beings will pay the terrible price of presumption in the day of judgment? How? Note an example given in Mark 2:6. Further, often the carnal who attempt to use the Word of God may see a surface meaning yet miss the real purpose of the Scripture (Mark 12:35–40).

In many instances, Jesus set us an example of denying the self. The orientation of the human mind and heart must be made subservient to the revealed will of God. In Matthew 26:54, 56 we read one of those examples. The flesh longed to avoid suffering. But the will of God had to be completed on the basis of authoritative Scripture. Christ, was the very Word of God in the flesh. Yet, the people did not recognize Him as that Word manifested. His literal presence meant nothing to them. Likewise, if the literal manifestation of the revealed will of God in these last days is not recognized and accepted, the presence of and the works performed by those chosen servants will not significantly influence those intent on pursuing letter of the law interpretations—that is, an interpretation of the Scriptures on the basis of their own personal study. Such an orientation has been the problem of human beings since creation. The natural carnal mind cannot comprehend things spiritual. It demands an understanding on the basis of the "letter of the law"—the physical dimension of the Word of God. Mark emphasizes this concept (Mark 14:49). That which is written is incontrovertible. It cannot be broken. Though the mind of man cannot comprehend it, Scripture is absolute.

Based on His absolute understanding of the Word, Jesus made many statements offensive to carnal minds. Jesus' statements were a part of the Word. They were absolute and could not be broken (John 10:3–5). The intent and purpose of the Scriptures is not the problem. The major problem is that man of himself cannot understand what is written. He

always thinks he understands. Men are right in their own eyes. How is it possible for them all to be right when they disagree with one another?

In many respects Scripture is being fulfilled in specific ways even now, yet most men are not aware of what is actually happening. Illustrated by the examples of Christ is this significant fact: Men do not understand the Scriptures specifically involved until a miraculous opening of the mind is granted. Read, compare, and think seriously about the following examples found in John 13:18; Acts 1:16; Rom. 10:11; and Gal. 3:22. In every case the understanding came only after the event occurred. Or, in the last two texts a real understanding will come to mankind in general only after the change into immortality. The real called, chosen, and faithful children of God will not be recognized by men in general until Christ's return and His specific approval is given to those chosen. A true child of God is one in whom Christ lives. If men in general cannot recognize Him living His life in those called and chosen today, how is it possible for them to recognize the true and genuine words of God—the Scriptures—which are a verbal manifestation of Christ? He is the Word manifested in the flesh, even today.

Being without understanding has not daunted men from assuming spiritual comprehension. Tragically, though once called and enlightened, even many of the chosen begin to assume, turning to doctrinal diversity. They employ the very words of God, argumentatively and in some cases scholastically, but in all cases without spiritual understanding. In essence, they turn back to a letter orientation. And in so doing, the Scriptures are massaged on the basis of personal views, times, and conditions under which they are living. Let us note a number of examples given in the Bible.

Hundreds of years prior to the time of Christ, a part of the Scriptures was written by Moses (John 5:47). The word "writings" is the same Greek word found in 2 Timothy 3:15, translated "Scriptures". The Greek word is *gramma*. It is frequently translated "writing(s)". Note carefully, here was a part of the codified Word of God. It was a way of life given to and made a part of the covenant agreement between God and His chosen nation, Israel. Yet, as time progressed, the people to whom it had been given deemed it necessary, on the basis of their own personal input, to reinterpret that Word which had been given to them. Having the Word of God did not keep them from employing their natural minds in any way they deemed necessary to make those Scriptures say what the people wanted. Having the privilege of reading and studying the Words of God did not keep them from going far afield from the correct understanding. Are human beings smarter and more spiritually oriented today? Yes, indeed, there are some called, chosen, and empowered with understanding during this generation of time in which we live. However, the only ones who will know and be confident in that knowledge are those who are called. The world did not recognize Jesus Christ as the Son of God—the Word of God made flesh. Will they recognize Him today—manifested in the lives of the chosen and faithful servants? No more than they did in His own body.

Somewhere today the true words of God are taught. That was a promise of Jesus Christ—a part of the Scripture which cannot be broken. The only people who will correctly comprehend the words of Jesus Christ and the words of Moses—a part of the Scriptures—are those who were called to recognize them and to accept in absolute faith. Others will merely quote and argue about them. Their interpretations will be predicated on personal convictions, emotional experience, and/or conditions under which they live.

In Romans 2:27 we read a very interesting concept: "And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?" The English word "letter" is the Greek word *gramma*—obviously referring to the written, physical, dimension of the spiritual law of God. Here is an example, according to the Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, of men using the Scriptures to justify their human concepts generated from their own personal study of the Bible. Rather than to be corrected by one called and commissioned by God—to whom a divine revelation had been given—those who heard reacted negatively and insisted on pursuing that way which seemed right to them.

Men can very easily speak the Words of God and not know whereof they speak (Matt. 17:10–13). They knew the physical dimension of the word, but they had no understanding of its real meaning. In this case the event had occurred but those who were warped in their thinking due to personalized interpretations did not recognize the fulfillment of the Scriptures which they were reading and studying—visible events happening in their very presence. How can one know the certainty of an event, or concept, unless he is thinking in harmony with the mind and spirit of the agency by which the concept is initially written or spoken? This is exactly what the Apostle Peter was inspired to write in 2 Peter 1:21.

Further, the faithful of God, those who yield to the simple and unalterable revelation promised, will always be the objects of ridicule and contempt by those who presume to understand on the basis of their own study and mental orientation (Luke 15:2). Such a reaction has always been true; and it will always be so. Men trust their own minds—the concepts which they uncover for themselves through their own study and research. Arrogant carnal minds will frequently attempt to set traps by which to accuse the faithful of God—traps which fail in purpose because those setting the traps employ an erroneous understanding of Scriptures (John 8:3–11). Note, even the disciples, under the training of Jesus Christ—a very capable Teacher—did not understand (Luke 15:2) what was being said until Christ clarified. Any conclusions drawn on the basis of their own mental interpretation would have been as wrong as those held by the "experts"—those who held the written (Scriptures) Word of God—with whom they were in constant confrontation.

The Responsibility of the Faithful When One in Authority Perverts the Word

Authority and responsibility vested in any one—or, a body, organization, group, whatever—remains valid until the higher authority removes them. (Even Satan, in some ways, deserves this respect [Jude 8–9]). Jesus taught this principle. He said:

. . . The scribes [*grammatūs*] and the Pharisees sit in Moses seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not (Matt. 23:2–3).

Obviously no man, including a minister, has a right to assume responsibility and office for himself. What goes on in the spiritual domain is the sole responsibility of God and His Son, Jesus Christ. They remove and set up in accord with their purpose—a purpose outlined from the foundation of the world.

From the above example we may ascertain this: The revealed Scriptures must be obeyed despite what those bearing responsibility assume and do. But, they may not assume anything beyond the duty to remain faithful to the way to which they were called. Because of carnality, those bearing initial responsibility had perverted both the Scriptures and the duties given. The righteous are not under obligation to change allegiance to truth and the Higher responsibility when those so assigned fail to honor their call and duty. However, those same righteous are not allowed to manifest contempt and disrespect for that body which God used initially. With all the strength, courage, and purpose we possess we—those who attempt to remain faithful to the original revelation—are endeavoring to do precisely what we are commanded to do.

The point here is that when those called to preach the word given fail to remain faithful, perverting the Scriptures once comprehended, the faithful must elect to obey the spiritual truth given, and at the same time manifest acceptable respect for that body which once taught the truth of God. The carnal influence in the minds of men is so strong that in due time most will revert to its dictates, perverting the Scriptures on the basis of physical study and research. In so doing they continue to maintain an attitude of exclusivity while at the same time demanding that the called reject their duty of faithfulness and give complete submission to them on the basis of their original spiritual duty—loyalty to a body proclaiming the truth. The called of God must walk in the footsteps of those who proclaim the word of God only as long as they walk in the footsteps of Christ. The standard by which that determination must be made is the "faith once delivered." The written Word of God is called the "letter." That letter dimension speaks with absolute authority. But, that dimension is not sufficient to fulfill the purpose which God has in mind for His called (Rom. 7:6 and 2 Cor. 3:6).

The real dimension of the Spirit is manifested in absolutes. There is no equivocation. When dealing with the letter, men tend to compromise—usually for the benefit of others who may hold contrary views. In order not to offend, the propagators of the letter interpretation earnestly and diligently apply the concept of compromise. The contrast between this compromise concept and the certitude of Jesus Christ is found in Matthew 7:29. He spoke with authority because the real truth is singular. It allows for no compromise. He knew and therefore spoke with that conviction. How contrary to the orientation of men.

In conclusion, for this issue of the *Monthly Letter*, let us call your attention to a specific text which we want to exhaustively cover in the future. It is John 5:38–40. That text alone should adequately explain the problem of a letter—physical—orientation. These people thought they understood the Scriptures, yet they did not recognize the literal manifestation of those Scriptures in the person of Jesus Christ. Think on the issue. It is most significant in understanding the Scriptures and their spiritual purpose for those called of God.

Please take care. You, as always, are fondly remembered. Any who will seek to faithfully obey the "faith once delivered" or who honestly seek to return to God are the recipients of all our love and thoughts of kindness along with a fond hope and trust that God will guide you as you continue your spiritual endeavor.

As always, your faithful servant in faith and confidence,

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