

A “New” Hermeneutic

by Maurice Barnett

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As we have seen, Hermeneutics is not a biblical word but is commonly used relative to understanding the Bible. It describes the process, by which we gain an understanding of what the Bible writers were saying in their own time and what that means for us now; it is gaining an understanding of the mind of God. But, hermeneutics can mean different things to different people, depending on what sort of process they follow and the presumptions they have formed. For instance, beginning with a Calvinist theology will force one to interpret scriptures to harmonize with all Calvinist theology. Catholics will interpret scripture in keeping with Church doctrines and traditions. The same is true when originating from Mormon, Jehovah’s Witness, Adventist or even a modernist’s perspective.

The Pharisees were masters of intricate man made rules and a dependence on the opinions of long dead Rabbis. Gnosticism, both Jewish and Pagan, changed with the individual teachers but all had fallible human wisdom as the source; their reasoning was based on faulty premises. See Colossians 2:18-23, I John 4:1. People manufacture all kinds of intricate ways to make scripture say what they want it to say. Instead of beginning from the basic position of what does the Bible actually say, one begins with preconceived beliefs. Thus, the meaning “hermeneutic” will change from person to person. It has been said that “if you will tell me your hermeneutic, I will tell you what your doctrines are.” This may generally be true. It could as well be said that “if you will tell me your doctrines, I will tell you what your hermeneutic is.” Thomas Olbricht, correctly said, “The word hermeneutic means whatever the person employing it wants it to mean,” *Restoration Quarterly*, Volume 37, Number 1. However, none of this says that we cannot reach an honest and clear understanding of the Bible. In our study, we must approach the scriptures to find out what they are saying instead of trying to force preconceptions and prejudices on the text to hear only what we want to hear. Remember what Jesus said about the Jews in Matthew 13:13-16.

What is called the “*New Hermeneutic*” among churches of Christ is not new. It is a liberal attempt to abandon the verbal record in favor of broad applications not found in the Bible texts. In other fields, this difference of positions might go by some other names. The new hermeneutic borders on, even overlaps, *Humanism* and *Antinomianism*; the first founded the “feel good” society, the second holding to an opposition to law. In approaching the U.S. Constitution, there are two points of view called “strict and loose constructionists.” The first insists on a close following of what the Constitution says, trying to adhere to what the writers meant by their words. The loose constructionists want a freer interpretation, the “spirit” of the Constitution, that virtually amounts to a “rewriting” of the document. The first is conservative, the other liberal.

In literature, there is *Deconstruction*, a theory linked to the philosophical writings of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man; in turn it is somewhat based on previous philosophers such as Hegel. The following explains the theory:

“Deconstructive theorists share with formalists and structuralists a concern for the work itself rather than for biographical, historical, or ideological influences. Like formalists, deconstructionists focus on possibilities for multiple meanings within texts. However, while formalists seek to explain paradox by discovering tensions and ironies that can lead to a unified reading, deconstructionists insist on the primacy of multiple possibilities. Any given text is capable of yielding many divergent readings, all of which are equally valid and yet all of which may in some way undermine and oppose one another.” *Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing*, Harcourt, Brace College Publishers, third edition, page 2046.

Notice that with *Deconstruction*, there is no concern with “biographical, historical or ideological influences.” On the other hand, the latest “*new hermeneutic*” may insist that the Bible speaks only to the cultural and social norms of the time it was written. They reason that since we have a different culture and varied societies today, the rules of the first century Bible must be changed or ignored to fit modern times; we must be “relevant” to our present society. Such theories allow for multiple interpretations based on the reader and not the text; anyone and everyone is right. These theories share that much in common.

In modern theological circles, what is called, “The New Hermeneutic,” as such, began with theologian Hans George Gadamer, who was born in 1900. But, the *basic* philosophy did not originate with him. Rather, he codified the work of Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann:

“In Gadamer, the hermeneutics of Ames and Ernesti has turned 180 degrees. The fullest statement of his thought appeared in 1960. In his view, not only is the recognition of an author’s meaning an impossibility, but so is the association of what a text now means with what it once meant to its author. Instead, the meaning of a text lies in the subject matter, the thing meant, which is independent of both the author and reader; yet it also is somehow shared by both. Thus the meaning of a text *always* goes beyond what its author intended, and the true sense is an unending process which is never exhausted or captured by an infinite line of interpreters! Thus there remains no yardstick for determining which interpreter is more nearly correct if both happen to hit upon conflicting interpretations at the same moment in time. There is neither anyone nor anything that can validate the interpretation in this sad state of affairs: not the author, not his words as he intended them: not even what the text meant in the past!” Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, page 30.

What we are presently facing in new hermeneutic theories is not just viewing scripture from multiple angles, but brushing away most of the Bible as having no application to our modern society. They are not just adding or switching expedients but rather they are changing the specific rules of God. Within just the past few decades, our “new hermeneutic” theories have had a profound

influence, one way or another, on churches of Christ. Larry Chouinard says it this way:

“New trends in linguistic studies have attempted to make the Bible intelligible and relevant to modern man. Taking up where Bultman leaves off, the hermeneutics of J. Robinson and a host of German scholars reflect a new understanding of the nature and function of language. Attempting to understand the “new hermeneutic’ is no easy task. The exponents of the movement essentially call upon the interpreter to enter into dialogue with the text in order to be subjectively confronted by language and events from a different historical context. When the language from a biblical context touches one’s life in a meaningful way, it becomes truth for that person. As Thiselton points out, the “new hermeneutic’ is more concerned with understanding the New Testament “more deeply and creatively’ than to “understand it correctly.’ One wonders if the proponents of the “new hermeneutic’ would dare to apply the same linguistic principles to their own writings.” Larry Chouinard, *Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Practice*, Kearley, Myers, Hadley, eds., pages 211-212.

So, the attitude is *not to understand the Bible correctly*, but rather to have a “mental and emotional creativity.” From that standpoint, the new hermeneutic is not new. It is the heart and soul of untold numbers of departures from the Faith going back to Bible times.

Nothing has been any more a product of imagination than the allegorical approach to scripture that appeared with such men as Origen in the late second century; he was followed by other like minded teachers in the school at Alexandria, Egypt. Much of the conflict that prompted Church Councils through the centuries following Origen was due to the philosophical differences on how to understand the Bible. The allegorical approach is still very much alive today.

Others have said that everything must be interpreted from the point of view of Jesus as the Word of God, i.e., *the Bible* is not the word of God, but the Word of God. Notice how “word” is capitalized or not. With the small “w,” reference is to the written scriptures, the rules, commandments of God. With the capital “W,” emphasis is on Jesus as the “Word of God.” Along with this little switch of capitalization came the slogan of the 1960s, “Preach the Man and not the plan.” That means, just preach Jesus as Lord and never mind about His rules, which ignores the fact that one cannot preach the Man without preaching His plan.

Others have insisted that everything must be viewed through the person of the Holy Spirit, i.e., the theologians particular *interpretation* of the Holy Spirit and how they think that factor is to be applied.

Yet, others emphasize “love,” or at least their view of what love is, as the guiding principle by which everything is interpreted. For these individuals, Scripture is filtered through some preconceived philosophy or principle, defined by a purely human wisdom or internal feeling. Every one of these approaches

has one thing in common: get rid of any rules and open the Bible to any interpretation desired.

World War II and its aftermath had a tremendous effect on society as a whole. People developed a view of the world, and their place in it, that had not been there before. Society in general deteriorated in its morals, religion, views of family, women's roles, and many other things; society changed drastically. Along with that came a change in thinking toward Bible authority, how to view vital Bible doctrines, church work and worship, etc. Some just became "tired" of the old paths and wanted changes made in the way we worship, the songs we sing, who can be in leadership roles in the church and too many other things to count. Others grew tired of the controversy that raged in the decade of the 1950's and wanted something that would give them peace at any price. For an excellent overview of the effect K. C. Moser had on churches, especially beginning with 1960, see the article by John Mark Hicks on "K. C. Moser and Churches of Christ: an Historical Perspective," in *Restoration Quarterly*, Volume 37, Number 3. Moser had contended for his grace/faith/unity doctrine since the 1920s but finally found fertile ground late into the institutional controversy of the 1950s. Moser, as much as any other, sparked the "preach the man and not the plan" era that is hand in glove with the new hermeneutic.

W. Joe Hacker, Jr., in *Pulse*, Winter, 1990, page 3, explains more of the philosophies behind the "new hermeneutic" in the following comments:

"Evolutionary or existential, the result is the same. For the evolutionist the scripture must fit into his model of a changing world evolving ever upward with man at the top of the stack. His view of scriptures is through glasses colored with a false view of the universe. God is defined in terms of the progress of religious thought through the prehistoric periods up to this modern insightful age of the physical and social sciences. The existentialist is looking for feeling, meaning, autonomous relationships, meaningful levels of communication which seem always to be born of crisis. For him, the Bible is not the word of God but contains the Word of God.

"In both cases, the basis of interpretation rests upon a philosophical presupposition which redefines the nature of God, the universe, and man. With these new definitions in hand, there follows a new hermeneutic. The Bible is interpreted to accommodate the evolutionary or existentialist society with man in the foreground and the Bible in the background. It is often presented as though truth is the exclusive discovery of this generation of mankind.

"Social reform movements since the second world war have produced an increasing cadre of psychologists and sociologists who inhabit every level of society today. The behavioral sciences have a place in the ordering of the earth by man, just as the natural sciences do. The problem occurs however when those trained in communications, business, sociology and psychology dress their secular view of man in Christian robes. Show me a man's hermeneutic and I will tell you his theology.

"The changing of the church to a generation acclimated more to higher levels of education, to more sophisticated levels of society, and to higher echelons of business often leads to a demand for a new hermeneutic and

more stylish homiletic in the name of church growth, sophistication and relevance. The question of change can easily become an obsession, often at the expense of the changeless aspects of the gospel.”

There is nothing at all *new* about these latest hermeneutic theories. The approach is *subjective*, i.e., scripture is filtered through the prejudices, wants, fears, philosophies and preconceptions of the reader. Whether it is couched in the form of a philosophical discipline or is but an echo of those people of whom it was said in the Old Testament, “*each man did that which was right in his own eyes,*” the result is the same. When one cannot find justification for something he wants to do in a present framework, he simply changes the rules. One man’s “truth” is as good as any other man’s “truth.” With the “New Hermeneutic,” the reader has as much right to say what truth is as does the Bible. Truth in one period of history is not truth any longer as each generation and society must interpret scripture in keeping with its own society at the time. Here is what Thomas Olbricht says in a paper presented at the Christian Scholars Conference at Peppering University, July 19-22, 1989,

“Our traditional approaches to scripture have likewise been challenged at the grass roots level through a number of concerns, such as divorce, drugs, Aids, homosexuality, and women’s rights ... The intuition has been that older approaches to hermeneutics do not help in getting closer to God and each other, nor do they help us sort out puzzling questions in regard to family breakdowns, divorce, and woman’s roles. So in some manner, interpretation of the scripture must be repositioned so as to provide more help ... Perhaps the most widely accepted view among certain front runners in Dallas, Fort Worth, Abilene, Nashville, San Antonio, and Searcy is that the scripture is not a constitution or code book, as envisioned by the old hermeneutic, but is a love letter from God.”

No, problems with family breakdowns, divorce, women’s roles and many other things, are upon us because the people with those problems are not following what God said in His book, the Bible. Changing or redefining the rules will not solve the problems nor bring people closer to God; that will only take them further away from God. The fault has not been with “older approaches to hermeneutics” but rather with a failure to apply what God evidently says. There has always been an attempt to justify multiple divorces and remarriages for any cause. Such attempts are perversions of scripture, but the “new hermeneutic” tries to lay down yet another basis for that justification, i.e., there is no need to argue about what Matthew 19:9 says, just ignore it to begin with! The problem with drugs, disease, and the like, is not with the scriptures. The problem is with self-willed people doing their “own thing.”

Saying that the New Testament is just “love letters” from God is not new. The late Carl Ketcherside wound up with the Christian Church and here is what he said in almost identical words as those reported by Olbricht:

“The apostolic epistles are not a pattern or blueprint. They were never intended to be. There is a difference between a love letter and a blueprint,” Carl Ketcherside, *The Twisted Scriptures*, page 173.

So, we aren't surprised to read from the same Scholars Conference mentioned above, that Allan McNicol says:

“We must shift our view of the nature of the hermeneutical task for the church. It is not to find the authoritative facts or doctrines in Scripture; or even to find the original meaning of texts. Rather, acting on the basis of our theological center is the gospel/ordinances, which God has provided as channels of grace for the spiritual growth of the community, we should be concerned to see that our theology and communal life conforms to that norm ... When we read the Bible in this light, maybe we can at last overcome the tendency to read it as a body of facts, a blueprint, or as a rule book for playing the ecclesiastical game.”

The late Hal Hougey, in his 668 page book published in 1997 and titled, *The Quest For Understandable Hermeneutics*, demonstrates how fuzzy his thinking was by the following comments about *direct commands*, p. 8:

“Some commands are *exclusive* (alternatives forbidden), while others are *inclusive* (alternatives acceptable). For example, Acts 2:38 commands repentance and immersion in the name of Christ. But to obey this command does not exclude prayer, communion, or godly living. Baptism does not exclude godly living:nor vice versa. On the other hand, the command to immerse does exclude sprinkling for baptism. Usually, but not always, simple logic, good sense, and context will indicate when commands are inclusive or exclusive.”

His book is full of such reasoning. He says commands are, by his definition, either *inclusive* of alternatives or they are *exclusive* of alternatives. He uses Acts 2:38, repentance and baptism, as an example of what he's talking about. The word “*alternatives*” refers to choices that can substitute for one another; you can do one *or* the other or both. He says that repentance and baptism does not exclude prayer, communion and godly living. But, that must mean that they are included *as alternatives that are acceptable*. That would mean that prayer, communion and godly living are *alternatives* to repentance and baptism; you can do one *or* the other. That is convoluted thinking in the extreme.

Hougey also denigrates examples and necessary inferences: the former is inadequate and ambiguous, while the latter is only a “tool of human invention,” page 102. That leaves only specific commands as authority, and, as noted above, these may have “alternatives.” He says on page 74:

“There are no explicit commands or precepts dealing with such theological questions as the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, the plurality of elders, a general church treasury, or congregational autonomy. Nor are there commands or precepts dealing with such moral issues as abortion, drug use, euthanasia, suicide, polygamy or slavery. Most Bible-believing people have strong convictions on these topics today. Biblical examples may be very helpful to decide on a course of action in at least some of these, by applying general principles illustrated in the examples.”

What is the conclusion to be reached from such premises? Simply, we can eat the Lord's supper any day of the week, have just one elder as well as many, do what we will about the use of money and have any kind of super organizational structure of churches that we wish. We may add to that the liberal views on the other items he mentions. Yet, *how will he apply general principles illustrated in examples without using the process of necessary inference?* Hougey meets himself coming back because his book is *loaded* with inferences that he wants us to accept. *Every* argument involves premises and a conclusion, which is an *inference!* If it follows correctly from proper premises, it may be a *necessary inference.*

In the *Restoration Quarterly*, Volume 8, Number 4, Roy B. Ward wrote on the subject "'The Restoration Principle: A Critical Analysis.'" At the close of his article, he says:

"The more difficult problem is that of hermeneutics. How is the exegeted text to be applied to the contemporary situation? The traditional Restoration hermeneutic involves a logical system of 'commands, approved examples and necessary inferences.' This approach ought to be subjected to critical analysis. These categories are not set forth as a hermeneutic within the text of the NT, but rather they are derived from a certain logical system imposed from outside the text. The question should be raised as to whether or not this logical system is consonant with the nature of the NT itself. And the presuppositions of this hermeneutic should be discovered and clarified."

Ward could not be more wrong. The approach he rejects is *inherent* in understanding human language, regardless of what national language that might be. Further, God teaches us how to understand His word, *in His word.* It is profusely exemplified by the Lord and then by His Apostles and is so clearly taught in Scripture that one must work hard to keep from seeing it.

A more recent offering on our subject is by Tim Woodroof in his book, *A Church That Flies, A New Call to Restoration in the Churches of Christ*, published in 2000. He says on page 12:

"The purposes we can articulate for the church : borrowed as they are from a prior generation and a radically different world: seem narrow and rote. In quiet and reflective moments, we question whether those goals are worthy of the sacrifices required. Many of us are no longer willing to pour the best of ourselves into the preservation of nineteenth-century modes of worship or doctrinal positions that, in our hearts, we no longer accept or believe to be central. Jesus did not die, nor do we want to live, to ensure that buildings not have kitchens or that music remain congregational and acappella or that a woman never make announcements in church."

Notice the conclusions reached by his premises. Instrumental music, solos and quartets, even musical bands, a role for women in public worship and most anything else in the liberal agenda would be acceptable under this approach. He continues on page 14:

"Having gotten the restoration bit between our teeth, it was hard to know where to stop. How many cups did early Christians use for the Supper? Was the bread they

used one loaf or bite-sized pieces? Where was the biblical authority for a Sunday School or cooperative support for children's homes or a Missionary Society? Did early churches build church buildings or hire located ministers? Was it proper to erect family life centers and hold marriage seminars and feed hungry people who wouldn't sit still for a Bible lesson? ... It was precisely over such questions that Churches of Christ have, for the past hundred years, reasoned and debated and argued. To the outside observer, all this frenzy about ancient patterns and modern practice seems obtuse and even absurd. What such an observer would fail to understand is the critical assumption we were making even as we split over these theological hairs."

One thing that Woodroof, and those like him, overlooks is that his appeal in the above matter would condemn the first century churches along with the Apostles. In the first century, divisions, parties, errors and disputations abounded on every hand. Brethren argued moral and doctrinal differences: the nature of the resurrection, the nature of the Christ, the Lord's supper, the second coming of Christ, divorce, remarriage, believer/unbeliever unions and dozens of other things. Did the Apostles deal with these issues and correct them, or did they just brush them aside, tell brethren that those things do not matter and just love the Lord? The answer to that is obvious.

Timothy was instructed to remain at Ephesus to see that no one taught a different doctrine from what Paul had taught them, I Timothy 1. He was warned about teachers of error who would lead brethren astray. He was commanded to reprove, rebuke and exhort as a deterrent to those who preferred error. These and many other things identified Timothy as a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine he had followed, I Timothy 4:6. Such instances in Scripture could be multiplied. Woodroof's solution? Since there is disagreement on so many things, dump the rules and find something else.

And, what is the basis for Woodroof's current position and contention? It is clearly seen in this statement from him on pages 141-142. Notice that his conclusions are based on *feelings*, not evidence:

"Call me slow. Or perhaps just gullible. But it has taken me a long time to honestly face some of the assumptions that are foundational to our particular enunciation of the Restoration Plea: assumptions about pattern and blueprint and dispensationalism and change, assumptions about what it means to be 'faithful' and how to define 'obedience,' assumptions about the nature of the church and what is central to the task of being God's people ... To tell the truth, my heart knew something was wrong years before my head caught on. I have never been comfortable with the sectarian rhetoric of the 'one true church.' Our exclusivism and isolationism seemed to me to stem from equal parts arrogance and insecurity. The 'identification' issues that were so critical to others never resonated very strongly with me; probably because I grew up in mission churches (primarily New Zealand) and was exposed to predominantly Christ-centered preaching (my father's) ... But my concerns had been felt rather than reasoned..."

I was confronted several years ago by a "conservative" preacher who disagreed with me on divorce and remarriage, as well as three other items.

When he explained to me how he had come to his conclusions, *in every instance* he started with what seemed fair and sensible to himself, not what the Bible said. His approach was purely subjective. But, we can find such attitudes even in the first century.

With every innovation since the Missionary Society, those who champion these causes have to leave behind a “thus saith the Lord” and by verbal gymnastics redefine terms and twist scripture. Or, as one brother told me in 1960, “We don’t have to have Bible authority for everything we do!” His subsequent apostasy was no surprise.

Love

For many writers we have already looked at, “Love” is the only principle underlying all scripture and so it is supposed to counter the need to conform to rules. I stated at the beginning that the new hermeneutic was not new. Among brethren, it has been around for a long time. In *The Search For The Ancient Order*, Vol. 2, p. 296, Earl West writes about Daniel Sommer. Shortly after Sommer was baptized in 1869, he entered Bethany College. West writes:

“The first disappointment that Sommer felt with the brotherhood came during his student days at Bethany. He noticed that there were two classes of disciples in the church. One class believed that the Bible was a revelation to the saint and sinner. The other believed it was only a revelation to the sinner. The rule with the latter class was that God gave a revelation to tell the sinner how to become a Christian, but beyond that, the rule was “love God and do as you please.’ There were no laws governing the church, and in the final analysis, sincerity alone was sufficient. President W.K. Pendleton was a champion of this point of view.”

W.K. Pendleton was also a major champion of the Missionary Society, instrumental music in worship and every other liberal trend among brethren at the time. The “disciples” who took the just “love God and do as you please” attitude made up the apostasy that was fast forming. Our current crop of advocates of the same position will wind up in the same place. Some, like Rubel Shelly and Max Lucado, have already arrived there, taking the same rationalist position that R.C. Cave did over a hundred years ago.

But, we can go back further than all this to find this position. As we have seen, a perverted view of love characterized the Gnostics in the first century. The apostle John dealt with this in his first two epistles. He also answered current views with the same statements. The following quote from Thomas Olbright explains the position of Augustine in the fourth century; it is true that love is at the core of revelation as we will see shortly, but it must be kept in its proper relationship with God’s rules:

“The work of Augustine (354-430) in his *De Doctrina Christiana* in some measure set the agenda for works on hermeneutics. In the first book, Augustine divided the task of preaching into discovering the message out of Scripture, then teaching it. The focal point of Scripture, Augustine declared, was love (*charitas*). Every aspect of Scripture

must therefore be interpreted according to whether *Charitas* is thereby commended," *Restoration Quarterly*, Spring, 1995.

To get a good look at current attitude on this point, the following quotations are typical of this position:

"The first thing to remember about authentic religion is that it is always relationship oriented. As opposed to seeing Christianity as a plan or system, Scripture reveals that everything reduces to two great commandments about loving God and neighbor. It is love for God that keeps one free of the world's pollution; it is love for neighbor that makes one sensitive to people in distress. Addictive approaches to religion pile up good works and try to win acceptance; true religion accepts God's gracious love and passes it on to others," Rubel Shelly, *LoveLines*, Vol. 26, Number 37, September 13, 2000.

"The apostolic epistles are not a pattern or blueprint. They were never intended to be. There is a difference between a love letter and a blueprint," Carl Ketcherside, *The Twisted Scriptures*, page 173.

Thus, love is separated from God's commandments. In recent days, Tom Couchman, a Deacon in a church in Colorado, presented much the same position. He did this in a sermon before a large, accepting, audience. In the course of his sermon of 10/17/99, taken from the tape, he insisted, in addition to the vision of "love" God and neighbor we just looked at, that *the only pattern in the New Testament is Christ!* He asserts that such things as church organization and autonomy, worship, kind of music, church treasuries, work, social versus religious activities, as well as other things are all somewhat taught in the Scriptures but what is said in the Bible about them is actually confusing and inconclusive.

Looking at his position, there is no doubt about his hermeneutic. It's almost as though he took his position out of Hougey's book, that of Cecil Hook or Carl Ketcherside, at whom we will later look. The similarities between them are compelling. It is quite similar to Hougey's statement in his book, p. 74:

"There are no explicit commands or precepts dealing with such theological questions as the weekly observance of the Lord's supper, the plurality of elders, a general church treasury, or congregational autonomy. Nor are there commands or precepts dealing with such moral issues as abortion, drug use, euthanasia, suicide, polygamy or slavery."

All of the above magnify what they call "love" as that which overrides or even removes rules. As we have seen, a major argument used by them is based on Matthew 22:36-38 and is said to prove that their concept of "love" overrides all other considerations. So, let's take a closer look at that section of Scripture.

When asked concerning the greatest commandment of the law, Jesus replied that it was love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind, and the second is like it, love your neighbor as thyself: "*On these two commandments hang the whole law, and the prophets.*" But, since the whole law of Moses, and the prophets,

“hung” on these two commandments, did that mean the Jews didn’t have to obey the commandments of the law of Moses or the prophets? Was every commandment to be ignored or treated of little or minor value? “Jews, believe what you want to about the Law as long as you are honest and sincere and have an emotional passion for God and neighbor.” Is that it? The answer is obvious. Of course not! *God didn’t put up with that from the Jews!* Jesus did *not* say that if you “love” God and your neighbor, you can *ignore* the law and the prophets or that other things do not matter! Here is just a sample of the many passages from the Old Testament that clearly insist on strict observance of the Law. Deuteronomy 5:32 says:

“Ye shall observe to do as the Lord your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess.”

This passage from the law “hung” on loving God and neighbor. Did the Jews still have to obey this edict from the Law? Certainly! Was the set of rules nullified by loving God and neighbor? Certainly not! The problem in this issue is that the liberal “new” hermeneutic miserably fails to understand plain statements of Scripture.

The scribe that had asked Jesus the question, answered Jesus very carefully, discreetly, Mark 12:33:

“...to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

This was the scribe’s statement and he did not mean that somehow the Jews could have just ignored whole burnt offerings and sacrifices and only, somehow, loved God and neighbor *instead*, perhaps as one of Hougey’s “alternatives.” The scribe got the point Jesus made that just the outward act of going through offerings and sacrifices was not enough; loving God and neighbor was “much more” than just sacrifices. Offerings and sacrifices meant nothing unless offered with the whole heart behind them. But, they still had to make the offerings and whatever else God told them to do!

The Jew had robbed God’s law of it’s essential elements, making it just a cold set of rules by which they thought they could earn salvation by perfect works, Romans 4:1-8, 9:31. Matthew 23:23 says:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith; but these ye ought to have done, and not left the other undone.”

Luke 11:42, the parallel account of this passage, adds “*love of God*” to the list of justice, mercy and faith. But, please notice that Jesus was not condemning them, *per se*, for tithing mint, anise and cummin. In fact, He said, “*these ye ought to have done and NOT left the other undone.*” No matter what commandment of God we are talking about, it must be obeyed with a view to justice, mercy, faith

and love of God or it is just an empty rule and one goes through vain motions. On the one hand, the Jews had rejected justice, mercy, faith and love of God in an attempt just to keep the law perfectly. The present liberal movement among us is going to the opposite extreme in trying to hold to what they consider to be justice, mercy, faith and love of God without following God's rules. They make the like mistake that the Jews made, only going to the opposite extreme, and are just as wrong as were the Jews!

Love, along with justice, mercy and faith, is a motivating factor in all that we do. In I Corinthians 13, Paul illustrates this by such things as giving all one's goods to feed the poor and giving his body to be burned. If one does such things without love as the motive, the doing of those things are vain and empty. Is it necessary as a Christian to help the poor? Yes. Must one be willing to lay down his life in the service of Christ if necessary? Yes. But, doing any of these things without love being involved has no profit. Romans 15:1-3 says:

"Now we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good, unto edifying. For Christ also pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me."

Some bear the infirmities of the weak out of selfish motives and not from love for the other. The hypocrites of Matthew 6 gave alms and prayed to be seen of men; they did these things to please themselves. Jesus said that the applause of those who saw their outward actions was all the reward they were going to get. Alms giving and prayer were both *essential elements* of being a servant of God, but were empty without the proper motive.

II Corinthians 9:7 says that when we give, we are not to give grudgingly nor out of necessity "*for God loveth a cheerful giver.*" A disciple must not give of his means just because he thinks he must do so and doesn't want to look bad before other Christians. He must give gladly and willingly. This is what Paul said about the Macedonian churches who "*first gave their own selves to the Lord,*" II Corinthians 8:3-5. Were they obligated to give? Certainly! Would they have disobeyed God if they did not give as instructed? Certainly!

The same points could be applied to Romans 13:8-10. Love of neighbor permeates the other commandments. The one who loves his neighbor does not steal from him, nor covet what he has, nor kill him, etc. The liberal authors listed above take the phrase "love your neighbor as yourself" and define that to suit themselves. They obviously mean by "love God," an intense emotional feeling. However, we must use Bible definitions in order to understand Bible teaching.

There is a *general* use of a term that can be seen with such words as "believe," or "faith." These words, in some passages, may include repentance and baptism so that *one is not a believer unless he has repented and has been baptized.* Just so, "love" may include other specific rules, but one does not love his neighbor unless he adheres to the specific rules. A person might have a

great emotional feeling toward God but still must be baptized to have the remission of sins. Believing in the existence of God, even full confidence in God and praying to God, is not enough.

Cornelius illustrates these facts, Acts 10. He had a faith in God, was prayerful, gave alms to the people and was much loved by them because of his goodness. He certainly loved his neighbor and, *as far as he knew*, loved God. Yet, HE WAS NOT SAVED! He had to start where everyone else must, hear and obey the gospel, Acts 11:14.

The Law of Moses forbade showing respect of persons between the poor and the mighty, Leviticus 19:15. In the verses following verse 15, the Law forbade talebearing, hating your brother, holding a grudge and other such things. Verse 18 closes with, *"thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."* They had to follow the rules that defined the meaning of loving their neighbor. The phrase shows the underlying motive for the rules, Romans 13:9, governing personal relationships.

Just "love" God and "love" our fellow man and everything works out with God's blessings is the same concept held by universalists. They say that God loves man so much that he just couldn't condemn anyone; hence, there will be no eternal punishment for anyone regardless of how wicked a person has been.

This is not to say that love is without emotional content. Romans 12:10 says that in love of the brethren, *"be tenderly affectioned one to another"* and as in the previous verse, *"without hypocrisy."* But, it means much more than affectionate feelings.

Love gives to the good or betterment of the other party. God demonstrated this: God so loved the world that He *gave* John 3:16. This is true of all relationships. However, it takes on a little different meaning in considering our love toward God. *There is no love of God without obeying His commandments!* Look at the evidence:

"Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous," I John 5:2-3.

"And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him; he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked," I John 2:3-6.

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him. Judas (not Iscariot) saith unto him, Lord, what is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, if a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my words; and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me," John 14:21-24.

This is not all. The very action of calling on God in prayer requires the same rule:

“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight,” I John 3:21-22.

“And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us,” I John 5:14.

These facts were well known even in the Old Testament and Jews of Jesus’ time showed that they understood this. John 9:31 says that one must be a worshipper of God and do His will in order for God to hear his prayers. For these new hermeneutics advocates to negate God’s rules by using our love of God to do so perverts the meaning of love in the Bible and will take one further away from God. In *Wineskins*, September/October, 2001, p. 27, Randy Harris, a Professor at Abilene said it this way:

“Second, in this postmodern world, the coming generation is not going to understand love for God in terms of getting it all right, but rather experientially and relationally. If all we have to offer is arguments for church government, weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper, a cappella music, and baptism for remission of sins, we have no future, for they are not interested. Their interest in authentic relationship in the church is not fed by such arguments.”

Thus, the professor tells us, love for God has no relationship with baptism for the remission of sins, the most basic of the above list of items. I have no doubt that a large number of people are interested only in emotional feelings, entertainment and having their own way. They will get rid of anything God has said if it gets in the way of what they want. That is the real foundation of new hermeneutics; it is an attempt to find a way to “justify” their own desires.

The New Hermeneutic and Unity in Diversity

Like the “new hermeneutic,” unity in diversity is not new. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Union Theological Seminary was rapidly sinking into theological liberalism of the worst kind. Some of the most liberal theologians in the country were professors there. Philip Schaff was one of them. He is best known for his authorship of the *History of the Christian Church* in seven volumes. In Volume 7, page 49, he comments:

“Nor should we overlook the important fact, that the differences which divide the various Protestant denominations are not fundamental, and that the articles of faith in which they agree are more numerous than those in which they disagree. All accept the inspired Scriptures as the supreme rule of faith and practice, salvation by grace, and we may say every article of the Apostles’ Creed; while in their views of practical Christianity they unanimously teach that our duties are comprehended in the royal law of love to God and to our fellow-men, and that true piety and virtue consist in the imitation of the

example of Christ, the Lord and Saviour of all. There is then unity in diversity as well as diversity in unity.”

This is classic “new hermeneutic” and it clearly shows the fact that it is the same as “unity in diversity.” Notice all the identifying marks, even the appeal to “love” as the principle motive. But, it was not new even with Schaff. Merle D’Aubigne wrote his *History of the Reformation* in the early part of the nineteenth century. He says on page 393, in a section discussing unity in diversity:

“There are two tendencies which equally lead us into error. The one exaggerates diversity, the other exaggerates unity. The essential doctrines of salvation are the limit between these two courses. To require more than these doctrines, is to infringe this diversity; to require less, is to infringe unity.”

His solution is what he considers the “essential doctrines of salvation” and is the same as the position of Schaff. The phrase defines the position and the position identifies the phrase for what it is. Whenever one finds the above arguments used, he can immediately know it is the liberal view of unity in diversity. And, the arguments have not changed in several hundred years. “Unity in diversity” is the *result* of a liberal hermeneutic.

“Unity in diversity” insists that there are only a few initial facts that we must believe and after that, we can disagree on Bible teaching but still *must* have fellowship one with another, “new hermeneutic.” That is, we must believe in God and Jesus as the Christ, though just what we believe about the person of Jesus of Nazareth is of no consequence. We, also, must believe that Jesus died for us and rose again. With, perhaps another item or two, that’s the list. After that, doctrinal matters are of no consequence to fellowship. Unity in diversity advocates may pride themselves that they still hold to conservative doctrinal positions, as a matter of personal belief, but they just will not make an issue of any of them; if someone else wants to take a differing position, its alright and fellowship is maintained. Up until a short time before he died, Ketcherside would speak in meetings with Christian Churches but would not sing when the instrument was used. He still, personally, felt it was not scriptural to use the instrument in worship. However, it was alright for the Christian Church people to use it and he would still have fellowship with them and encourage them in their beliefs. But, he changed even *that* practice before he died and eventually sang with the instrument along with the rest, the natural conclusion to his hermeneutic.

The next generation to come, having been introduced to an unscriptural unity in diversity at the present time, will go even further; creeping departure will soon become galloping apostasy. Once one abandons revelation as an absolute standard of truth that must be followed, there is no stopping short of complete modernism with eventual abandonment of the Bible, altogether. It is a pattern of conservatism digressing to extreme liberalism that’s been seen in many religious groups, even some churches of Christ.

I have heard this unity in diversity position for quite a long time on the divorce and remarriage issues, Creation and other subjects. Some preachers have insisted they personally believe that the only Bible reasons that would allow remarriage of an individual is divorce for fornication or the death of the spouse. But, if someone else takes a diverse position, no matter how liberal, how wild, they will not make an issue of it nor break fellowship with the other. Another says that he personally believes that God created the universe, the earth and everything in it in six literal, consecutive days, but if someone else believes that it took multiple millions of years by a slow evolutionary process, he will make no issue of it; he will continue to defend and shelter the other. This attitude is expressed on any number of Bible subjects.

There have been quite a few individuals who have taken the unity in diversity route; we have already looked at some of them. K. C. Moser had such a profound effect on brethren that there is no way to determine, this side of judgment, just how much damage he did, just how many disciples he took with him into apostasy. But, we certainly see the effects of his work.

Another “sleeper” is Cecil Hook. Several years ago, he published his book, *Free in Christ*, which was sent free of charge to anyone who wanted it. 1993 saw its seventh printing; thousands of copies have made the rounds. He praises Carl Ketcherside and LeRoy Garrett which tells us where he’s coming from. It’s interesting to note just how much resemblance there is between what Hook wrote with what we are hearing out of other brethren today. There are current statements and positions even from “conservative” brethren that are almost verbatim out of *Free in Christ!* A second volume by Hook followed that one, titled, *Free to Speak*. In the second volume, he went even further in his propagation of liberalism.

A.T. DeGroot of the Christian Church said in his 1960 book, *The Restoration Principle*, page 139:

“It is one of the insights of devoted biblical scholarship since Thomas Campbell’s time to see that loyalty to Jesus Christ takes precedence over and gives meaning to a Christian use of the New Testament. The New Testament is itself the record of a fellowship created by loyalty to the accepted Messiah and Savior, a fellowship which transcended differences of worship methods and ethical interests, so long as an increasing embodiment of the will of Christ was ever the goal of the companions of the Way ... His (Thomas Campbell, MB) spiritual descendents in convention assembled in Denver, Colorado, in 1938 found no difficulty or incongruity in taking fellowship in the World Council of Churches, which has as its creed the words “Jesus is God.”

DeGroot identifies the heart of the Unity in Diversity scheme. I deny that Thomas Campbell would approve of the union of his so-called “spiritual descendents” with the World Council of Churches. Yet, that is the ultimate end of the Unity in Diversity doctrine. We will look at more of this shortly.

As we have already seen in this chapter, both new hermeneutics advocates as well as unity in diversity lock on “love,” along with mercy, justice and faith, as factors that override law. Hook does this as well. He contends that the greatest

thing is love, the only creed is Christ, if “love” comes in conflict with law, then law must give way, man’s own judgment determines what laws of God will be obeyed or not, etc. He claims that though the Law condemned false witnesses, Exodus 20:16, and Ananias and Sapphira were slain because they lied, Acts 5:1-11, “*the Bible gives record of other persons who were dishonest and were not punished,*” page 29. In fact, Hook’s position is identical with the “situation ethics” of some years ago, as well as the old: “the end justifies the means.” He attempts to find authority for that position in the Scriptures. Among his arguments are the following on pages 29ff; these are typical of his reasoning.

(1) “Rahab lied and deceived in protecting the spies (Josh. 2:1f). Yet she is listed among the heroes of faith for that very reason ... Heb. 11:31.”

What are we to conclude from Hook’s argument except that it is alright to lie as long as we are honest and sincere in doing it, that the end justifies the means!

Hebrews 11:31 says that “*By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace.*” Nowhere does God commend Rahab for lying! The commendation came regarding how she treated the Israelite spies, not for lying. James 2:25 says that she was justified by works “*in that she received the messengers and sent them out another way.*” Joshua 6:25 says that she was spared “*because she hid the messengers.*” Where does it say she was a “hero of faith” for lying to the king about the location of the messengers and that God approved of it? This is indicative of how Hook handles scripture.

(2) Hook insists that David and his men entered the Tabernacle when hungry and ate the showbread, which was lawful only for priests to eat, and God approved it, Matthew 12:4ff. No, he’s wrong again. (I deal with this instance in detail in another Chapter). It was the Jews who did not condemn David for what he did. Jesus was only turning the inconsistency of the Jews back on them. If the Jews did not condemn David then they should have no criticism of the Lord’s disciples plucking grain to eat as they walked through the grainfield. The text *does not* say Jesus approved what David did. David still broke the law and Jesus said so.

(3) The priests “profaned” the Sabbath by offering sacrifice and were guiltless, Matthew 12:5. Thus, one could break the law of the Sabbath under certain circumstances and it’s alright with God. No, Hook is wrong again. Even though it was “work” that the priests did on the Sabbath, it was by God’s command that offerings were made on the Sabbath, Numbers 28:9-10. That is why they were guiltless. The work of Priests on the Sabbath was excepted from the “no labor” rule. That did not mean that *anyone* could disregard the Sabbath law on whatever basis they wanted. Again, Jesus is turning the obvious back on the Jews. They had made the restrictions of the Sabbath so tight that they would have to condemn the Priests for offering sacrifice on that day.

Another argument Hook makes that’s like this one is the fact that circumcision was performed on the Sabbath, that “*the law of Moses not be broken,*” John 7:22ff. However, the same God who gave the Sabbath command and priests

sacrificing on the Sabbath, also said that male infants were to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. That was a crucial time for circumcision. If the eighth day fell on the Sabbath, then it was done on the Sabbath as God directed. But, there is no basis for ignoring the Sabbath law with impunity because of these instances. There is no basis for Hook's assertions in any of these passages. Hook doesn't understand the Sabbath any more than the Jews did. He gives us a conclusion as follows, page 32:

“If, in a specific instance, our efforts to keep a law hinders or prevents the principles of justice, mercy, faith, or love, then the higher principle must take precedence. The principle is greater than the law intended to promote it.”

None of the instances Hook points to were violations of the Sabbath law to begin with so there were no principles of justice, mercy, faith, or love that had to take precedence over the law. Keeping God's instructions *never* hinders justice, mercy, faith, or love. Hook makes them separate from Law when they are not. See the preceding material on the subject of love and the commandments of God.

In this unity in diversity issue, much discussion has revolved around the identity of false teachers. Hook argues that only evil minded, covetous individuals, intent on deception, can be tagged as false teachers. If a man is honest and sincere, regardless of what he believes and teaches, then he is to be retained in fellowship, and even encouraged. They rely on II Peter 2:1ff as evidence.

This puts us right back to the position that as long as a person is honest and sincere then he is alright with God and we must accept him. That destroys the Bible as a standard of truth: anything goes!

Let's explore II Peter 2:1 and some other passages so we can understand what is being said. Peter said:

“But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.”

It's clear that “false teachers” in this instance is the same as “false prophets,” being two ways of saying the same thing. “False Prophets” comes from a single compound noun, *pseudoprophetes*. The word itself does not indicate any inadequacy of ability nor is it necessarily a commentary on his character; *other words have to establish that*. The same is true of “false teacher,” from *pseudodidaskolos*. He is a teacher of what is false. Hook says in *Free in Christ*, page 64, that “false” is an adjective that modifies “teacher” and must refer to the bad character of the teacher and has no reference to what he teaches. That is bare assertion and completely untrue. Of course, these particular false teachers spoken of by Peter were of bad character, but *they were false teachers because they taught false doctrine; they brought in destructive heresies*. *The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* by Louw and Nida, defines the “false teacher” as follows:

“33.250 *pseudodidaskaloi*, *ou m*: one who teaches falsehoods - false teacher, teacher of what is a lie. ... and in the same way “false teachers will appear among you’ 2 Pe 2.1. In rendering *pseudodaskaloi*, it is important to avoid an expression which will simply mean that a person pretends to be a teacher and is not. What is important here is that the individual teaches what is not true.”

The claim by Hook, and others, that “false” is just an adjective that modifies “teacher,” as though it is only a comment on the bad character of the teacher, is not true. The original term is a compound noun, a single word. The character of this false teacher can only be determined by other terms in the passage. The same can be said about “false prophets.” Louw and Nida say about that term:

“53.81 *pseudoprophetes*, *ou m*: one who claims to be a prophet and is not and thus proclaims what is false - “false prophet.’ ... “many false prophets will appear and fool many people’ Mt 24.11.”

Pseudoprophetes, false prophet, is found twice in the *Septuagint* Old Testament:

“For from the least of them even to the greatest they have all committed iniquity; from the priest even to the false prophet (*pseudoprophetes*) they have all wrought falsely,” Jeremiah 6:13.

“And hearken ye not to your false prophets (*pseudo-prophetes*), nor to them that divine to you, nor to them that foretell events by dreams to you, nor to your auguries, nor your sorcerers, that say, ye shall by no means work for the king of Babylon: for they prophesy lies to you, to remove you far from your land,” Jeremiah 34:9-10.

These were false prophets because of what they taught. Notice that the character of the false prophets is not the issue. Seeing that when Peter mentions false prophets that came in among the people, we can find out from the Old Testament just what these individuals were like. Was it a matter of bad character or what they did that was most disturbing? Let’s look at some passages:

“The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so.....” Jeremiah 5:31.

“Then the Lord said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart,” Jeremiah 14:14.

“Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord,” Jeremiah 23:32.

“For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the Lord,” Jeremiah 29:9.

These are but some of the passages on the subject. Notice that the emphasis is on what the false prophets did. They taught error and drew the people away from God. From this, Peter later said that the false teachers would bring in destructive heresies.

Homer Hailey, in his *Commentary on The Minor Prophets*, page 18, says under the heading of “False Prophets”:

“Along with the true there arose also false prophets (see Deut. 18:20-22; Jer. 28). These flourished from a very early period in the nation’s history to the time of the close of the Old Testament writings. The false prophets fall into the two general classes, mercenary and political; some prophesied for money, others for political favor (see Mic. 3:5, 11). Oftentimes the false prophets were nationalistic: that is, they defended the national practices and rulers through ignorance; but whether false through ignorance or self-will, they and their messages were no less severely denounced by the true prophets. Albert C. Knudson has well said: ‘An ignorant conscientiousness may be quite as dangerous to a community as deliberate wickedness.’ When opposed by false prophets, the true prophets rise to their greatest heights of zeal and fearlessness.”

Brother Hailey said that there were prophets who were honest and sincere, but *they were still false prophets who did much damage!* Notice also brother Hailey’s reference to “true prophets” as versus “false prophets.” Who was a true prophet except those who spoke the will and word of God, Deuteronomy 18:19-22. True prophets spoke the word of God and false prophets did not speak the word of God. The difference is drawn in Jeremiah 23:16, 28, that shows the true prophet speaking out of the mouth of God and the false prophet from his own thinking:

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord.”

“The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully...”

The same can be said for “false teachers” as versus “true teachers.” Those who speak “visions of their own heart” are false teachers, regardless of their character. The only test we have to determine the difference between the two is the word of God spoken faithfully! The comments of brother Hailey in the above quotation are echoed in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume 4, page 2466, article on “Prophesyings, False”:

“There were, however, false prophesyings from men who honestly believed themselves to have a message from Jeh. The prophecies from self-deceived prophets often led the people astray. The dream of national greatness was substituted for the voice of Jeh. It was against such prophesying that the true prophets had to contend.”

Bible emphasis is that the false prophets prophesy falsely, as the false teacher speaks error. False apostles were to be tried, tested, Revelation 2:2. Did it mean that, in testing them, you only need to find out if they are sincere or not? If they aren’t sincere, then they must be false apostles. They were false

apostles because they were not apostles and whatever they taught was false. Paul said he would have been a false witness if he testified that Jesus had been raised from the dead if He actually *had not been* raised, I Corinthians 15:15; that's how Paul identifies a "false witness" in this instance. His honesty or dishonesty as a witness would not have changed that. A "false witness" means nothing without false testimony.

I have known of a couple of "gospel preachers" in the past who preached the truth, but were dishonest and deceitful. They lied, defrauded, stole and many other ungodly things. Were they the ones who were the "classic" false teachers because of such a bad character, *even though what they preached was the truth?* I also know of "leading" brethren who defended, protected and covered up for these men because they were "sound" on the current issue of the time. But, this is turned around today so that someone can preach doctrinal error that will damn people to hell but because he is a nice guy, doesn't cuss, chew, drink, steal or any other bad thing, we must defend, protect and cover up for him just because his character is "good"; he is not a false teacher! I have known of preachers and other brethren through the years who destroyed churches, caused others to be lost and yet were so very sincere in what they believed and taught. They did it honestly, but still brought destruction and division.

In II Peter 2:1, the word "heresy" refers to false teaching, false doctrine. Heresy couldn't refer to the attitude and character of the teacher but what the teacher taught and the result of his teaching. So, let's see if we have this straight: if these false teachers and false prophets teach error, causing destructive heresies that will damn others eternally, it is alright, they are acceptable to God, *provided they are honest and sincere in what they believe.* Or is it that destructive heresies result only from *dishonest* teachers? If this is so, then it appears to me that we should quit trying to instruct others in regard to correct church organization and work, worship, divorce and remarriage and a host of other things. Instead, we should just teach people to be honest and sincere and *let them believe, practice and teach whatever they want!* Of course, that is exactly the "new hermeneutic" and "unity in diversity" doctrines that have plagued us for so long!

This unity in diversity position is wonderful indeed for every teacher of error. You can just believe, practice and make converts to whatever doctrinal position you want and you can still enjoy the warm fellowship and shelter of brethren! Some just do not like the *tag* of "false teacher." Well, call them what you like: false teacher or teacher of false doctrine: the *consequences* of their teaching will be the same in either case.

Those who defended continued fellowship with the pious unimmersed in the nineteenth century used arguments familiar to us today. It was said then, and now, that each person decides by his own conscience what is truth; that loyalty to one's self is loyalty to God; that no person is completely right on every Bible passage and so cannot criticize any other person who thinks differently. The

subject of the pious unimmersed was thrown into Romans 14, as all unity in diversity advocates must do, so that others had to accept any person as a brother regardless of his belief. Anyone who opposed having an open fellowship with the pious unimmersed was called a hobby-rider, alarmist, legalist, Pharisee, and other like terms. We have always gotten the same labels thrown at us by those who want to do something not authorized in Scripture. F. D. Srygley, in the *Gospel Advocate* way back in August of 1890, said:

“To put the whole thing in its simplest form, the theory is that any man who is right in *spirit or motive* will be accepted of God no matter what the outward form of his conduct may be. It puts man’s salvation wholly upon the ground of his own honesty, and taboos the idea that anyone will be damned who has the *spirit of obedience*, no matter how grave may be his mistakes as to the letter of God’s commandments. Much has been said against rationalists, but in my judgment they have done no more than follow this spirit-and-letter buncombe to its legitimate, logical consequences. The point is, does God require man to conform his life to an external standard, or does he leave him to determine his own course by an internal light? Is man guided in religion by revelation from without, or by a spiritual light and nature *within* himself? Did religion originate in miracle, and is it perpetuated by teaching, or is it innate with man in principle, and developed by evolution? Those who talk flippantly about keeping the spirit of a command while sneering at the letter of the law, or the exact thing commanded, are but the logical premises of which rationalists are the necessary conclusion, whether they so understand and intend or not...”

Outside of the letter written by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, Acts 15:19-29, the two letters to Thessalonica are, chronologically, were the first New Testament epistles written. What Paul had taught them while he was with them about the second coming of Christ, and what he wrote to them in I Thessalonians 5, was misunderstood and misapplied. Their error prompted the second letter a few months after the first. In II Thessalonians 2, Paul corrects them on the subject. He warns that they “*be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise...*” He gives other instruction and admonitions and closes in II Thessalonians 3:14, saying:

“And if any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed.”

They were capable of understanding revealed truth in what Paul told them and nothing else would do!

But, then it is asked, “haven’t you ever been wrong about some Bible teaching; haven’t you ever had to correct some position you had formerly taken; are you saying that you think you have always been right about everything?” Of course, that’s like the old weak-kneed, liberal cry that the church shouldn’t discipline, withdraw from, anyone because we all sin at some time and so shouldn’t judge. That argument fails to understand the difference between those who sin and repent as compared with those who will not change when they have sinned. Those who refuse to repent must be disciplined. Titus 3:10 says that “*a factious*

man, after a first and second admonition avoid.” Likewise, some people will hold to error regardless of the efforts to change them. That’s different from those who are willing to change when their error on some subject of passages is pointed out and time is given for them to study it for themselves. But, what shall we say about Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado or a host of others whose errors have been brought to their attention, exposed publicly, and yet they will not return to the truth? Or, is it that one must go as far from the truth as they have gone before a teacher of error is to be rejected? I have no evidence to doubt the honesty and good character of Shelly and Lucado, Hook or Moser. With the position of far too many, we would have to accept, defend and promote these men because their character was and is good.

It’s obvious that there are disagreements on nearly every Bible subject, all over the world, even among brethren. It is said that if one person has a right to be wrong at any time, then everyone has a right to be wrong as well; perhaps everyone has a right to be wrong all of the time on everything. On this basis, we are told that there is no absolute standard of truth but only one’s perception of truth, wherein each person has a right before God to his own perception of what is truth. Again, this is the same old “believe what you want to believe as long as you are honest and sincere.”

As we continue to study, we may find our understanding has been incorrect. At that point, we are under obligation to God to make the change. This is clearly seen in the many places in the New Testament where Paul and other inspired men corrected errors of every sort, speaking and writing sternly by the authority of Christ, even rebuking some, exposing others. Look at I Corinthians as an instance of this. But, Hook says, page 66, *op.cit.*:

“Neither side at the Jerusalem conference were false prophets; nor was the sincere Apollos, who was in error on a major doctrine through lack of information. Great teachers and reformers of the past, though they may never have gained some necessary doctrinal understandings, cannot be denounced as false teachers. They were honest searchers even, as I trust you and I are.”

Hook doesn’t know anything about the character of the teachers who came to Antioch from Jerusalem, whether or not they were honest seekers after truth. If they were honest and sincere, they should have been accepted and allowed to continue their teaching, by Hook’s standards. Why then did Paul and Barnabas have such a heated contention with them? Hook also says on page 66, *op. cit.*:

“We are in error when we castigate someone who differs from us in his sincere effort to know and do the will of God. He is doing all that you or I can do:his best. He is in error on some things even as you and I are in error on some things. The only brothers we have are brothers in error, someone had observed.”

Hook condemns Paul and Barnabas with these words. It was wrong for them to oppose those teachers of error from Jerusalem as they did because these teachers were honest seekers after truth, according to Hook! Yet, Paul and

Barnabas pursued the matter all the way to Jerusalem, determined to get it straightened out according to the will of God and no other way.

No doubt Apollos was honest and sincere. But, he was also very wrong and had to be corrected. Also, what would have been the judgment about Apollos if he had rejected the truth after being taught correctly?

Certainly, time may need to be allowed for someone to repent of whatever their error may be, doctrinal or moral. In the church at Thyatira, Revelation 2:18, was an ungodly prophetess, called Jezebel, who was being tolerated by the otherwise commendable church. The Lord says:

“And I gave her time that she should repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication.”

Time had run out and now there would be a reckoning, punishment would be administered. We see this in several of the churches of Asia in Revelation 2-3 as we have already seen in Titus 3:10. Even someone who is *terribly wrong* may be given time before he is avoided; admonition is administered and time is given for the person to repent. But, there is still a time *limit*. Thus, Paul said to the Thessalonians:

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us ... And if any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed,” II Thessalonians 3:6, 14.

Did Paul expect them to understand what he had written to them? Certainly! Could they make the distinction between truth and error, realizing that what they had been taught in his presence and what he had written to them was the truth? Certainly!

Notice, also, the last sentence of the quote from brother Hailey. It can well be said today that when we are opposed by teachers of error, that those who stand for the truth “rise to their greatest heights of zeal and fearlessness.” But, this especially enrages the defenders of these teachers of error and they jump even moreso to their defense, doing everything in their power, using every ungodly tactic at their command to smear the opposition. Lies, deceit, political maneuvering and more, all become common. We have seen this through the controversies of the last half of the nineteenth century and since then to today.

I Corinthians 1:10

We will continue discussing unity in diversity, but at this point let’s look at it in light of I Corinthians 1:10. Paul says:

“Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

Since this is in the name of Christ, it is a command that must be obeyed, which was possible for the Corinthians, and for us today.

Carl Ketcherside did say some things that are true and worth our taking notice. He says in *Twisted Scriptures*, beginning on page 66:

“God no more expects all of His children to be exactly alike than I do my children. Nor does he “tighten the screws’ on them to enforce conformity any more than I would twist the arms of the members of my physical family. The truth is that His revelation teaches us we are different from each other, and it is because of this we are able to fulfill His purpose and carry out His will upon the earth. Mere likeness in every detail would make this impossible. A man is able to be one flesh with his wife, not because they are alike, but because they are not. Oneness is not exact likeness.”

He then lists several items that show there was “unity in diversity” among brethren in the first century. I will simply note the items in order, along with their purpose rather than quote all of what Ketcherside says about each point.

[1] In the early church, there was a diversity of *gifts*, I Corinthians 12:4-7. Various spiritual gifts were given to different individuals; not everyone received a spiritual gift nor did all those who did receive a gift have the same one.

[2] There was a diversity of *functions*, Romans 12:4-5, I Corinthians 12:19. Members of a local church have different abilities that they are to use to the fullest. Men and women have different functions.

[3] There was a diversity in *understanding*, I Corinthians 3:1-2. Some were still babes in understanding and had to feed on the scriptures in order to understand and grow to spiritual maturity.

[4] There was a diversity of *knowledge*, I Corinthians 8:2-11. This is essentially the same point as point three.

[5] There was a diversity of *customs*, I Corinthians 9:19-23, 10:32-33. Different societies have different customs. There was a difference in social customs of Jew and Gentile. The Gentile was not obligated to become a Jew.

[6] There was a diversity of *opinions*, Romans 14. There is a whole area of things that are matters of personal choice, including decisions on *expedients of generic authority*.

All of this is quite true. However, Ketcherside then leaps to the conclusion that there can be an unlimited diversity in worship, work, organization and belief, etc., because diversity exists in the above areas. That is only assertion, completely contrary to fact.

I Corinthians 1:10 does not demand that we all be clones of one another. Nor does it insist that there be no disagreements at all between the individual members at Corinth. There can be disagreements that do not qualify as divisions, schisms or heresies though there are some disagreements that do. I Corinthians 1:10 is talking about instruction from God, in whatever way the instruction is given.

The area of expediencies, (options allowed in carrying out specific instruction), is a part of Paul's instruction. We see this in his saying that something may be lawful but not expedient.

In Chapter 11, there are detailed instructions about the Lord's Supper that had to be observed; they were matters that could not wait for Paul to arrive there, verse 34, but had to be corrected immediately. Yet, there were then, and now, choices regarding the Supper that could be made: time of day, geography and topography, number of containers and other choices that were available.

When Paul says that they were to be of the same mind, judgment, speak the same things and have no divisions, we can look at the things in the Corinthian church over which they were divided. Start at chapter one and march through the book and it is clear that the things that divided them, things where they did not have the same mind and judgment nor spoke the same things, were matters that Paul corrected with *specific instruction*.

Heresies appear when someone picks up some doctrine contrary to specific revelation, or magnifies an expedient into a law and then insist that everyone else follow their opinions. We can have a "unity in diversity" only in the areas *allowed* by specific revelation and God is the one who tells us the difference.

Gospel and Doctrine

As already said, with both the liberal hermeneutic and unity in diversity positions, it has been necessary for them to make a distinction between the "gospel" and "doctrine." By this, they identify the gospel as being just "the basics," "the fundamentals." These have to do with belief in God, Christ, repentance and baptism. That is essentially it. We have also seen that writers such as Philip Schaff mean only by the fundamentals, a belief in God and Christ. By this, Schaff insists that all denominations should have unity because they all believe the fundamentals, are honest and sincere and love God and neighbor. After that, they can believe and practice whatever they want and should still have unity. This is why there is such an uproar out of unity in diversity advocates whenever anyone condemns false doctrine and false teachers, fights error, insists on an absolute standard of truth, etc. That's too negative for them.

Ketcherside said, in *The Divine Purpose*, Page 148, under the heading of "The True Pattern":

"The gospel is not a system of doctrines to be believed, commands to be obeyed, and promises to be enjoyed. The gospel is good news about a person!"

Ketcherside couldn't have been more wrong. The distinction made between gospel and doctrine has no foundation in fact. The gospel is far more inclusive than these individuals want it to be. It is granted that belief in God, in Christ as God and Saviour, repentance and baptism are all requirements to be found at the heart of the gospel. But, that is far from being all there is to it.

The word, *gospel*, means *good news*. The verb, *Uangelidzo*, is translated as *gospel, good tidings, glad tidings* and in many instances translated as simply “preached,” as in “preaching the glad tidings.” It may refer only to glad tidings about something *other than* what we consider to be the gospel. It is used in Gabriel’s message to Zacharias, when informing the latter of the coming birth of a son, John. Gabriel said that he was there to “*bring thee these good tidings,*” Luke 1:19. Yet, as here, we must look to the context to determine the *content* of the good news. The same can be said of the noun form, *uangelion*, as can be seen by viewing the listing in a concordance.

THE KINGDOM: The very first thing we learn about the content of the gospel is that it is the “gospel of the kingdom of God.” That is not the gospel coming *from* the kingdom of God, but the gospel *about* the kingdom of God. Notice Luke 16:16 followed by Mark 1:14-15:

“The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached and every man entereth violently into it.”

“Now after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel.”

The *gospel of the kingdom of God*, the *gospel of God* and the *gospel*, all refer to the same message. Matthew 4:23 says that Jesus went throughout Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom, as does Matthew 9:35. In Luke 4:43, He said that He “*must preach the good tidings of the kingdom of God*” to other villages, as also Luke 8:1.

The gospel that the Apostles were to preach was the same gospel. Jesus, instructing about events leading to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, said in Matthew 24:14:

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

Acts 8:12 says that Philip the evangelist “*preached the good tidings concerning the kingdom of God.*” Jesus had told the Apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, Mark 16:15-16, and this involved preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

The message was that the kingdom of God prophesied in the Old Testament, the kingdom to be established in the first century was at hand. Colossians 1:13-14 says:

“...who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

The purpose of the gospel was to take men from darkness to light, Acts 26:16-18, I Peter 2:9-10. Since being translated into the kingdom is part and parcel with being delivered out of darkness, then understanding the truth about the kingdom is part of the gospel.

I have heard from several sources through the years that it is alright for a Christian to believe in Premillennialism as a private opinion and we must still have fellowship with him, defend and promote him because he has believed the “fundamentals.” But, he *hasn't* believed the “fundamentals.” Premillennialism is false doctrine about the kingdom. It is a perversion of prophecy and its clear fulfillment in the first century. It is an attack on the authority of the Lord who was raised to sit on David's throne, the kingdom throne. Premillennialism attacks salvation itself. *For one to believe Premillennialism is to deny the gospel of the kingdom and thus to deny Jesus.* If one does not understand the gospel, he does not believe the gospel and if he does not believe the gospel, he cannot be saved, Mark 16:16. And, no one has the right to fellowship and promote anyone who denies the gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE CHURCH: Jesus purchased the church with his own blood, Acts 20:28; his death was a fact of the gospel and vital to our salvation. We are baptized into one body, I Corinthians 12:13; this is a command of the gospel we are to obey. One meaning of the word “kingdom” refers to the people of God, the church, so it is the gospel of the church in that sense. What the New Testament teaches about the church, the body of Christ, the house of God, is thus directly related to the gospel. If the sacrifice of Jesus is at the heart of the gospel, how can one ignore as a part of that gospel His body and just what His blood did for us?

CREATION AND THE CREATOR: Revelation 14:6-7 says that the “*everlasting gospel*” contained giving God the glory, worshipping Him “*that made the heaven and the earth and the sea and fountains of waters.*” It's not surprising then, that we find Paul preaching the gospel at Lystra, Acts 14:11-17, and including God *the creator* as part of the “good tidings,” *the gospel*. When Paul preached the gospel to the Athenians, Acts 17:19ff, he said a great deal about God as the creator of the earth and of all men. There were consequences of that fact that reflected on their salvation. To believe or teach anything other than what the Bible teaches about God *and His creation* is an attack on the gospel.

THE RESURRECTION: The resurrection of Jesus is also a center piece of the gospel. That in turn directly relates to the subject of resurrection in general and also the very nature of man. Jesus answers the Sadducees in Matthew 22, saying “*ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God.*” Hymenaeus and Philetus, II Timothy 2:17-18, erred from the truth saying the resurrection was past. In I Corinthians 15, Paul argues the resurrection extensively. He begins the chapter by establishing the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the heart of the gospel he had preached to them. On the basis of the resurrection of Jesus, he rebukes them because of their error in saying there is no resurrection. Notice that the second coming of Jesus is also a part of his teaching here. It is a long chapter with many arguments. Anything other than what the Bible says about the resurrection is error and must be opposed; one cannot preach the gospel and preach error on the resurrection.

LIFE AFTER DEATH: The fact of the resurrection goes hand in hand with the existence of a soul and life after death. II Timothy 1:10 says that Jesus “*brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*” In II Thessalonians 1:6-10, the second coming of Jesus, judgment and eternal torment are brought up in connection with those who do not obey the gospel. Paul preached the gospel to the Athenians in Acts 17 and spoke of the nature of God, resurrection and judgment on an appointed day. No errors on any of these items can be tolerated.

THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL: Paul gives us information about the death of Christ and its consequences, Colossians 1:21f:

“And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unreprouable before him: if so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded and stedfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven...”

It is necessary for us to continue in the faith, grounded and stedfast and not moved away from the *hope of the gospel* in order for the value of the death of Christ to do in our lives what God planned for it. He did His part and we must do ours. This takes us to the subject of “the faith.” And that brings us back to such subjects of error, departures from the faith, from the truth, from sound doctrine as exemplified in passages like I Timothy 4:1-6 where some fell away from the faith. They did not remain grounded and stedfast.

THE LORD’S SUPPER: I Corinthians 11:17ff has direct instructions about the Lord’s Supper. The importance of it is that it represents the death of Jesus; as often as we eat the bread and drink the cup we proclaim His death *till he comes*; the subject of the second coming of Christ is found in our observing this. Doing it in an unworthy manner brings condemnation. “Manner” refers to the way it is done.

GALATIANS: Paul says in Galatians 1:6-9 that they had left the gospel of Christ for a different gospel. Paul corrects them, especially in chapters 3-5. In 3:1-5, he rebukes them sharply for going back to the things of the law. He then argues the difference between the Old and New Testaments. Those three chapters identify what the Galatians had gone to when they left the gospel of Christ for another gospel. *All that Paul condemns are perversions of the gospel of Christ!* As he says in 5:4, if you seek to be justified by the law you are severed from Christ and fallen from grace. The truth that the Bible teaches on the subject of the Old and New Testaments is part of the gospel.

THE MYSTERY HID: In Galatians 2:11ff, Paul identifies the sin of Peter. He walked not uprightly “*according to the truth of the gospel,*” Paul said. Showing respect of persons as Peter did was related to the gospel message as a perversion and had to be condemned. The mystery hid and now revealed is that both Jew and Gentile had equal opportunity of fellowship with God and must be accepted as brethren, Ephesians 2:11-22, 3:1-13. This is why Paul said in Romans 16:25-26:

“Now to him that is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal, but now is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known unto all nations unto obedience of faith.”

PERSON OF CHRIST AND GOD: The teaching of the Bible is that Jesus is God come in the flesh. Jesus declares it, John 8:24. Any error regarding that must be exposed and opposed. I John extensively attacks the Gnostic errors on the nature of God and Jesus, identifying specific arguments and answering them; he called the Gnostics false prophets and liars. Was John the one in error for doing such a thing? Certainly not! Even Bible teaching on the physical lineage of Jesus is part of the gospel, II Timothy 2:8. Paul said a lot about the nature of God to the people of Athens in Acts 17. Their errors had to be corrected.

SPECIFIC RULES: Paul lists in I Timothy 1:5-11, several things that are contrary to the gospel:

“But the end of the charge is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned: from which things some having swerved have turned aside unto vain talking; desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm. But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully, as knowing this, that law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and unruly, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for abusers of themselves with men, for menstealers, for liars, for false swearers, and if there be any other thing contrary to the sound doctrine; according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.”

We have already looked at the difference between the Old and New Testaments. But, notice especially the specific sins, which are listed in more complete form elsewhere, such as Galatians 5:19ff, I Corinthians 6:9ff. Among the sins that are *contrary to the gospel* is *fornication*. That has a direct relation to Matthew 5:32, 19:9. What Paul is telling Timothy, and us, is that telling people what is contrary to the gospel is part of preaching the gospel.

However, it should be understood that when the Apostles preached, specific subjects were suited to the audience and occasion; not everything found in the gospel was presented at any one time and place. On Pentecost, Acts 2, Peter preached the gospel by inspiration. He discussed the fulfillment of prophecy, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, along with His authority as Lord and even brought up the throne of David that opened up the subject of the kingdom. But, Peter didn't have to discuss the existence of God, nor His creative power, nor a number of other things because the Jews *already believed those things*. Too, there were many other things Peter said on Pentecost that are not recorded, verse 40.

When the audience was made up of idolatrous gentiles, as in Acts 14 and 17, the content of the sermons were different. Yet, Peter and Paul both preached the same gospel, thus, Galatians 1:23, 2:7:

“...but they only heard say, He that once persecuted us now preacheth the faith of which he once made havoc ... but contrariwise, when they saw that I had been intrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the gospel of the circumcision ...”

We must also take notice of the instructions of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20. The Apostles were to teach all nations, baptizing them and “*teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.*” Recall the promise of the Holy Spirit in John 14:26, 16:13. He would guide them into all the truth and teach them all things. *That* is the entire New Testament.

The gospel in its entirety is the good news of the New Testament. Everything God has revealed to us is good news and relates to our eternal salvation. We can cross reference with the gospel numerous terms such as the truth, the faith, the word, the good doctrine, etc. Then, consider that failure to comply with these will bring sin and eternal death. To limit the gospel to just what some call “the essentials” is an attempt to nullify the rest of the New Testament, open fellowship between Christians and the world and allow false doctrines to be propagated unopposed.

Phariseeism

This is a name that’s often thrown around, especially toward anyone who insists there are rules to be followed. It is intended to prejudice, declaring that anyone who disagrees with their liberal approach to the Scriptures is as bad as the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned in such passages as Matthew 23.

In doing this, these critics emphasize only the tendency of the Pharisees to make rules where God had not made rules and the Pharisaical perversions of the Law. These critics take the Pharisee’s perversions to be what it must mean to insist on obedience to God. They end up doing with the law the opposite of what the Pharisees did. We will see that shortly.

The Law of Moses could not save, Galatians 3:10-14. It pointed one to ceremonial cleanness, social acceptability and the like, Hebrews 9:9-15. It covered ceremonial sins, social and relational sins by the offering of sacrifices and other observances. There was provision for the cleanness of the flesh, Hebrews 9:13, but not actual forgiveness of sins and, consequently, a cleansing of the conscience, Hebrews 9:9-10. Of course, it also foretold by various means the coming of the Christ who would bring redemption, as well as providing information about the coming New Covenant, the Kingdom, and other things.

If one could have kept the law perfectly, then he could have claimed salvation on the basis of perfect works; God would have owed him salvation, Romans 3:27-4:8. But, no one could keep the law perfectly. By the time an Israelite

reached the stage in life that he could make a decision about keeping the law perfectly, it was too late. He had already sinned and his “perfect” record was ruined.

However, this does not mean at all that the Law was bereft of spirituality and that its purpose was one of a cold set of rules; any rules can be degraded to such a state, even the New Testament. The Jews were the ones who made the Law just a set of rules to be followed, to which they also added some man-made rules of their own. Romans 9:32 tells us that they “*sought it not by faith, but as it were by works.*” Jesus said of them:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel!” Matthew 23:23-24.

See, also, Luke 11:42 where it adds *love* to justice, mercy and faith. Though we have looked at this subject under the section on “Love,” we will look at the basis of the critics charge here though it repeats some of what has been said.

By way of background, Deuteronomy 14:22 says that they were to “*tithe the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year.*” See also Leviticus 27:30. Mint, anise and cummin were garden herbs of the least value. The Jews would tithe anise seeds from their garden but be uncaring and ruthless toward their brethren, indifferent to love of others, without faith or love in regard to God. Their dedication was to the rules. Such tithing was easy compared to the effort that would go into practicing justice, mercy, faith and love. But take note! Jesus did not condemn them for tithing mint, anise and cummin. This was included in the commandments of the Law. But, so were justice, mercy, faith and love! These were things that gave meaning and life to existence and composed the foundation all of the Law. So, keep in mind that Jesus said that they *should have tithed mint, anise and cummin*, but only along with justice, mercy, faith and love as the underlying motives.

As in Matthew 6, there was nothing wrong with fasting. Jesus not only fasted but said His disciples would fast. There was nothing wrong with giving alms in public places as long as the right spirit and manner was used. The same is true regarding many other things.

God’s purpose for the Law was not that it should be just a cold set of rules to be legalistically followed, just going through ritual motion. It had a spiritual purpose. Romans 7:12-14 says: “*So that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good ... For we know that the law is spiritual ...*” We can see this also in Romans 1:16-17:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, but the righteous shall live by faith.”

This last phrase, “*the righteous shall live by faith,*” is literally “*the just by faith shall live.*” It is quoted from Habakkuk 2:4. Being a quotation from the Old Testament, we must conclude it is as much a teaching of the Law as it is the Gospel.

Faith was as much a necessary part of the Law as it now is of the New Covenant. For that matter, faith was necessary *before* the Law of Moses. This is Paul’s argument in Romans 3-4. The “faith of Abraham” was pre-Law. But, faith was an essential element from the beginning, as seen in Hebrews 11. For a fuller discussion of this subject, see Volume 2 of this series, “*Reconciliation,*” pp. 278-325.

Further, faith, then and now, does not negate obedience. The faith of Abraham was an obedient faith just as was the faith of each individual cited in Hebrews 11. After warning about an evil heart of unbelief in Hebrews 3:12, verses 17-19 say:

“And with whom was he displeased forty years? was it not with them that sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that were disobedient? And we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief.”

Notice that the disobedience was unbelief and the unbelief was disobedience. Thus, faith would have been obedience. The Israelites failed in faith as seen by their disobedience, rebellion against God.

Numbers 20 records the incident of the waters of Meribah. Moses was told to speak to a certain rock which would then bring forth water. Instead, Moses struck the rock with his staff and spoke to the people, taking equal credit for the water. God said in verse 12, “*because ye believed me not to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel,*” that Moses would not be allowed to lead the people into Canaan. Moses had not become an atheist. But, he had disobeyed God.

Complete *confidence* in God is also an essential part of faith. This is seen in Hebrews 11 as well. Abraham left his home land not knowing where he was going; he offered Isaac fully confident that God would raise him from the dead. That was more than just accepting God’s existence. The essential elements of faith are acceptance of the existence of God as the only God, putting complete confidence in Him and on these two facts, doing whatever he commands. The Pharisees accepted God’s being and that was it. They put their confidence in their own ability to save themselves by just perfect works. Romans 10:1-3 says that they were ignorant of God’s righteousness and while seeking to establish their own righteousness “*did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God.*” John 12:42-43 says:

“Nevertheless even of the rulers many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the glory that is of men more than the glory that is of God.”

Though these Jews believed on Jesus, meaning they mentally accepted who he was, it was not enough. It was no better than the demons of James 2:19 who

believed in the existence of God. And, they trembled. Yet, the Jews who believed on Jesus would no more be saved than the demons. This is why, after warning in Hebrews 9:17-19, which we have noted above, that Israel did not enter Canaan when first planned because of unbelief/disobedience, he says in Hebrews 10:1-2:

“Let us fear therefore, lest haply, a promise being left of entering into his rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good tidings preached unto us, even as also they: but the word of hearing did not profit them, because it was not united by faith with them that heard.”

Endnote

Looking back over the last hundred and fifty years at the controversies among brethren, a pattern appears. From the Missionary Society, instrumental music and the pious unimmersed controversies, all those who *opposed* those errors and innovations were charged with trying to divide the church and break fellowship between brethren. It never fails that if anyone objects to an error or innovation then he just has a bad attitude, is an alarmist, a legalist, a Pharisee, an Anti, is only trying to cause trouble, or some accusation like these. If what is taught is the truth, then it should be embraced. If it is error, then it needs to be exposed as such.

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