

Speaking as the Oracles of God

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God - 1 Peter 4:11

Legalism and Liberalism

The error of *religious* Legalism or Ultra-Conservatism (anti-ism) centers upon the lack of recognition of personal freedom in the area of optional matters – it restricts what God allows (Mark 7:1-13).*

The error of *religious* Liberalism pivots around the notion that one does not need Bible principles or specifics authorizing what we do in Christianity – it allows or loosens what God has bound (Genesis 3:3-4).*

The good and honest heart; with willingness, obeys the Lord's instructions – seeking and finding the Mountain Top of God's Truth (Luke 8:15; Matt. 7:7-8; Acts 17:11):

Whatever I command you, be **careful** to observe it; you shall not add **or** take away from it (Deut. 12:32).

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth** (2 Timothy 2:15).

...that you may learn in us [the apostles] **not to think beyond what is written**, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other (1Corinthians 4:6).

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: **If anyone adds to these things**, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; **and if anyone takes away** from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Rev.22:18-19).

The Legalist and the Liberal are both trying to legislate for God and stand condemned (James 4:12a; Colossians 2:22-23). The good and honest heart, with godly fear, submits to God's authority and receives with meekness the implanted word which is able to convert and save (Ps. 19:7; James 1:21; Is. 66:2b; Heb. 11:7).

Remember: The devil seeks to take the word of God **out** of our hearts (Luke 8:12). God and His people are in the business of putting the word of God **into** our hearts (Acts 11:14). Which category are you in dear reader?

With these thoughts and warnings in mind, consider the comments made by Brother Graham Fisher (Christian Worker August 2009) when discussing problems and divisions connected with the Lord's Supper:

I think too you can see why I feel a sense of despair when I look at the communion we love, **because I haven't a clue what we can do about it**. Thomas and Alexander Campbell shook the Presbyterian dust from off their feet and strove to get back to the Bible alone. I **don't believe that sort of option is now open to us**.

Why not, Brother Graham? Why is the option of getting back to the Bible alone not an option for us today? Surely it ought to be the case that this is the only option. Speaking as the oracles of God – getting back to the Bible alone – is *exactly* what God wants us to do:

To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them (Isaiah 8:20).

If any one speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God (1Peter 4:11).

And **whatever** you do in word or deed, do **all** in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Col. 3:17).

Hold fast the **pattern of sound words** which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus (2Timothy 1:13).

Writing in support of Graham's article (Christian Worker September 2009); Brother Geoff Partington (Morley) contributed the following:

Does Peter stand at the gates of heaven with a clipboard and pen asking new arrivals "How many cups did you use?", "Did you break bread weekly?", and "Did you use unleavened bread and unfermented wine?" Only if he ticks all the boxes will you be allowed in? That is, are we saved by holding to **correct doctrine**, even down to the level of tithing mint, dill and cumin?



My salvation does not depend on how many cups I use; it is the gift of God's grace. Nor does it rely on me singing unaccompanied by instruments, using unleavened bread, unfermented wine, or following any of the other **'essential' doctrines**. If it did, grace would no longer be grace! [Bold emphasis mine: BC].

But Geoff, there's a massive difference between a legalist or ultra conservative (anti) who binds a man made doctrine like the one cup (Matthew 15:9; Acts 15:5), and a faithful child of God who insists that God's word be obeyed (1 Samuel 15:13-26; Luke 17:10).

The Lord has made it perfectly clear that He expects an obedient faith. Obedience is not a swearword. Obedience is not something we should ridicule and scoff at:

And having been perfected He [Jesus], became the author of eternal salvation to all who **obey** Him (Heb. 5:9).

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father in heaven (Matthew 7:21).

But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, **and does not do them**, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand (Matthew 7:26).

...to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight – **if indeed you continue in the faith**, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven... (Col.1:22-23).

A Work of the South Cambridge Church of Christ

Schedule of Services

Worship ... 11:00 AM
Sunday School...12:30 PM
Bible Study Wednesday.... 7:30 PM

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Published Jan. 2010

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The idea that obedience to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles somehow invalidates or contradicts the grace of God is utterly absurd (Acts 2:42; Matt 25:31-46; 28:20).

The scriptures clearly teach that we gain **access** into the free gift of God's amazing grace by an obedient faith (Galatians 3:26-27; Rom. 5:1-2; 1 Peter 1:22-23; James 2:20-24); and that we **continue** to enjoy the free gift of God's grace as we "walk" (manner of life) in the light of God's word (Ps. 119:105; 1 John 1:6-7; 2:4; John 15:10):

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, **teaching us** that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age...(Titus 2:11-12).

What will happen to us if we do not live soberly, righteously and godly? What if we hear the sayings of Jesus but we refuse to obey them? Will God's grace still save us? Is grace no longer grace because we must obey? What do the scriptures say? (Romans 4:3):

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, **but** a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries (Hebrews 10:26-27).

...and sin, **when it is full-grown**, brings forth death. Do not be deceived my beloved brethren (James 1:15-16).

Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, **if you continue in His goodness**. Otherwise you also will be cut off (Rom. 11:22).

But in every nation **whoever fears Him and works righteousness** is accepted by Him (Acts 10:35).

The Legalist **makes** laws that God has not made (i.e. the one cup issue); the Liberal **removes** the laws that God has made (i.e. correct worship according to spirit and truth). Both systems are enemies to our souls; they corrupt the pure milk of the word; cause division, and lead us away from God (1 Peter 2:2; 2 John 9; 1Cor. 1:10).

Which leads us to the remarks made by Brother John Grimditch (Christian Worker Nov. 09) – the ultimate example of trying to correct one extreme (Legalism) by adopting another extreme (Liberalism):

In my experience the viewing of the scriptures from Matthew to Revelation as the **actual covenant** is the **cause** of most religious division not only in churches of Christ but also in Christendom in general...

Once we take the insistence of 'covenant' from these scriptures (**as if it were a legal document**) then we remove the sharp divide and it no longer is a search for correctness and conformity...

Our covenant is the same one which the first Christians received – Acts 2. **It is definitely not the block of scriptures from Matthew to Revelation...** [Emp. B.C.]

Graham Fisher doesn't believe we have the option of going back to the Bible alone; Geoff Partington doesn't believe correct and essential doctrines have anything to do with our salvation, and John Grimditch insists that Matthew to Revelation is not a legally binding document.

According to John (who has obviously forgotten the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 10:34-39), Matthew to Revelation is the cause of most religious division and shouldn't even be considered as part of the New Covenant. This is blasphemy and heresy of the worst possible kind – akin to King Jehoiakim cutting and burning the Scroll of Jeremiah during the apostasy of Judah (Jeremiah 36:21-26).

The apostle Paul, who was inspired to write a large section of Matthew to Revelation, has this to say about the matter:

If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that **the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord** (1 Cor. 14:37).

...**how that by revelation** He [Jesus] made known to me [Paul] the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, by which, **when you read**, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed **by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets** (Ephesians.3:3-5; see also: 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 and 2 Peter 1:19-21; 3:15-16; Galatians 1:8-12).

Who is mistaken? Is it John Grimditch or the apostle Paul? Is the apostle Paul lying to us about his writings John?

The First Christians (Acts 2), according to the Lord's promise (John 14:26), received the gospel spoken verbally from the apostles as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance. The truth wasn't written down at this stage. The truth was **inside** the inspired men. But the Gospel they received and obeyed was exactly the same Gospel that we receive and obey today. How could it be different? (Galatians 1:1-12):

And they continued steadfastly in **the apostles' doctrine** and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers.

And the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great number of the priests were **obedient to the faith**.

And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the **decrees to keep**, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem (Acts 2:42; 6:7; 16:4).

Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things **and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you** (1 Corinthians 11:2; see also 2 Thess. 2:15).

It wasn't long, however, as the above and following statements by the apostle Paul also demonstrate, before the words of the Lord (Matthew to Revelation) were being written down in a permanent form and distributed throughout the congregations (See also: John 20:30-31):

Now when this **epistle is read** among you, see that it is **read** also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise **read the epistle** from Laodicea (Col. 4:16).

...**I write** so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1Tim 3:15).

And if anyone **does not obey our word in this epistle**, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed (2 Thessalonians 3:14).

Conclusion

God has designated His inspired, legally binding, revelation; or body of truth (Matthew to Revelation), in a number of different ways, and we ought not to latch onto one designation at the expense of another (Ps. 119:160).

We read about the New Covenant written on our hearts (Heb. 8:8-12); the Faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3); the Truth (2 Tim. 3:7); the Way of salvation (Acts 16:17; 19:9; 24:14); the Word of the Lord (Acts 13:49); the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16-17); the perfect law of liberty (Jas. 1:25); the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2), and the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

All these designations refer to the **same** body of truth. This body of truth is good (1Tim. 4:6); knowable (John 8:32); blesses those who obey it (Rev.22:14), and will judge us all on the last day (John 12:48; 17:14).

(* T Hightower, 1998 Lubbock Lectures, page 181)