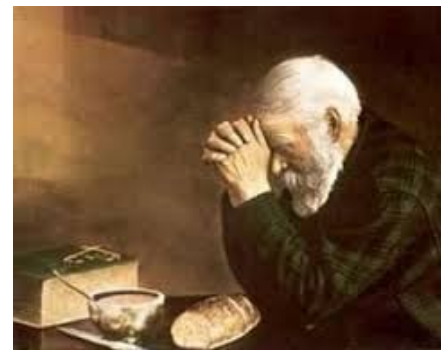


*God's Word
In
Your Heart and
Mouth*



God's Word in Your Heart and Mouth

Certain voices in the brotherhood have been advocating what they call a 'new hermeneutic'. In plain English, they think we need to 'interpret' the Scriptures in a new way. They criticize our 'old' way of understanding the Bible.

The basic thrust of this 'new hermeneutic' is that we should not view the Bible as a "pattern" or a "constitution" but as a "love letter from God". (They seem to think it can't be both.) The idea that we should have specific Biblical authority ('book, chapter, and verse') for all we teach and do in the church is discredited, along with the related requirement that there be authorization by direct command, binding example or necessary inference (that which necessarily follows from what is said in the Scriptures).

According to them we should 'begin with God' rather than 'beginning with the Scriptures'. They emphasize the nature of Jesus and are critical of those who

emphasize 'sound doctrine' (1 Timothy 1:10; 2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1). (Again, they seem to think it is not possible to emphasize both.) They claim that our Bible knowledge is relative, private, and unreliable.

Some of these ideas were taught in an article "No Word Without Interpretation" which appeared in one of our papers. The writer stated: "It is interesting, then, that someone would assume that a person could pass God's word through his eyes-mind-mouth and still guarantee that the meaning remains what God intended."

Why is this so strange? God did say: "The word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it" (Deuteronomy 30:14). Paul applies this to the gospel: "The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach)" (Romans 10:8).

ernment. From that new way of interpreting the Scriptures several new denominations developed, because certain churches of Christ wandered away from the truth.

The 'new hermeneutic' which led many churches into apostasy in the late 1800's was similar to the 'new hermeneutic' that is now being proposed. So why don't they just join the 'Disciples' or some other denomination where their 'new' hermeneutic is already well-established?

But no, they want something 'new'. They are trying to change the Lord's church into a denomination of their own liking. They may succeed at causing divisions that develop into 'new denominations'. But they will not destroy the church of Christ. It has existed now for 2000 years and until the Lord comes again it will continue to serve God according to His word.

In every generation some will try to change the church, to adapt it to their own liking, and to lead it away from Christ. They who do not love the truth are deceived (Matthew 24:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

After Israel escaped from Egyptian bondage by the power of God and settled in the promised land we read this sad comment: "When all that generation had

been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10).

"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:17,18).

"We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19-21).

...Roy Davison

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some of the finest Christians I have known. We had teachers who had dedicated their lives to Christian education while receiving half the pay they could have gotten elsewhere. There I had Bible teachers and heard sermons by brethren who were 'mighty in the Scriptures' like Apollos of old (Acts 18:24). Was there something wrong with that?

(Actually, they knew the Scriptures better than most 'professors' I later had at a Christian university. Have you noticed that writings advocating a 'new hermeneutic' contain a lot of high-sounding words but little Scripture?)

Was there something wrong with the gospel we preached? with our worship?

I graduated from university in 1961 with a major in Speech and Bible, and a minor in Greek. Of course that was in the 'dark ages' thirty years ago, but I do not recall that the word 'hermeneutics' was ever used in any of the Bible classes I took. We just studied what the Bible itself says about understanding the Scriptures. Was there something wrong with that?

Was there something wrong

with the gospel we preached? with our worship? with our relationship to God? Was there something wrong with the way the churches were led?

According to the above cited article there was: "Since the late 1800's, the churches of Christ have centered on 'inductive hermeneutics', which often resulted in circles and lines and complex steps of logic that made sense only to the person making the point!"

This wild unsubstantiated accusation reminds me of Paul's words: "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm" (1 Timothy 1:5-7).

Notice the date in this accusation. What happened in the late 1800's? That was when a minority (about 20%) of those who had been meeting as churches of Christ in the U.S. refused to go along with a 'new hermeneutic', a new way of interpreting the Scriptures, which was introduced to excuse the use of musical instruments in worship and centralized forms of church gov-

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbour, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" (Hebrews 8:10, 11). "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them" (Hebrews 10:16).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16). Thus, it must be possible. "You shall know the truth" (John 8:32). It is possible. God wants all men "to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). We can know the truth!

This does not mean, of course, that we know everything: "We know in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9). Only God knows everything. But we can know what God has revealed. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

The article cited above also stated: "In the final analysis, none of us can guarantee that what we mean is what God meant, when His Spirit spoke through the original authors."

God says His word (both Old and New Testaments) can be in our HEART and in our MOUTH. Anyone who denies that God's word is in his mouth should keep quiet since Peter said: "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

This idea that we cannot really know or speak the word of God accurately is false.

This idea that we cannot really know or speak the word of God accurately is false. "He who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord. Is not My word like a fire? says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:28, 29). [Of course many do NOT speak God's word faithfully. Read the whole chapter to learn what will happen to them!]

We can know, understand, and preach the word of God. "Preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2). It must be possible. Effort is re-

quired. "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).

Although the Bible does not refer to itself as a 'love letter' no Christian would deny that God's great love for us is revealed through the Scriptures. But does that mean that Scriptures do not provide a 'pattern' for the church?

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A constitution is "a system of fundamental rules, principles, and ordinances, for the government of ... any organized body of men" (Webster). The New Testament does not claim to be a 'constitution' and I know of no brethren who say it is!

The advocates of the 'new hermeneutic' are the ones who like to use this word. They do so for the purpose of DENYING that the Scriptures provide a 'divine constitution' for the church. They dislike the restraints of a 'constitution'.

The Scriptures are not less, but more than a 'constitution'. The New Testament is a God-given covenant! Constitutions are made and modified by men. The

New Covenant is given by God. No man has authority to disregard or modify it. "Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:28, 29).

Do the Scriptures provide us with a pattern?

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul said: "These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, 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" (1 Timothy 3:14, 15).

In his second letter, after the warning: "But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13), Paul admonishes Timothy: "But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures,

style similar to the generally held hermeneutic of the church from 30 years ago."

This sounds like King Ahab's accusation: "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" Elijah replied: "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD" (1 Kings 18:17, 18).

Maybe this 'growing group' is nothing more than a 'growing awareness' of an attempt by some to forsake the commandments of the Lord and to lead us astray "through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

Was there something fundamentally wrong with the way we understood the Scriptures thirty years ago?

Some of us are old enough to remember. On March 4th, 1951 I was baptized into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27). I had never heard the word 'hermeneutic' but I had heard the gospel. I just obeyed the gospel. Was there something wrong with that?

When I was eleven we attended a congregation where the elders encouraged daily Bible reading.

I started reading five chapters each night before I went to sleep and continued doing so for many years. I grew in knowledge and faith (Romans 10:17). Was there something wrong with that?

The summer of 1953 I attended summer Bible schools at Perryville and Estevan, Saskatchewan. They were very different from 'Vacation Bible Schools' many churches have today. Both schools lasted two weeks and Bible classes were taught from 9 to 12 and from 1 to 4. We heard a forty-minute gospel sermon each evening. We had lots of fun. We played baseball after four and picked wild strawberries in the woods. At Perryville some of the younger children enjoyed watching the mice run around on the other side of the building during the sermon each night! (The building had a sand floor with benches made of fence posts and boards.) But our main purpose for being there was to learn the word of God. I recall that one of the classes at Perryville was a thorough study of Ephesians. We had memory work and wrote examinations. Some classes dealt with Bible books, others with Biblical themes. Was there something wrong with that?

In 1954 I went to Radville Christian College in Saskatchewan for high school. There I met

(Romans 6:17), 'sound doctrine' to be taught (Titus 2:1) and which some cannot endure (2 Timothy 4:3), a 'pattern of sound words' which we must hold fast (2 Timothy 1:13). We must abide in the word of Christ (John 8:31) which will judge us on the last day (John 12:48). We must learn not to go beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6). The Scriptures certainly provide us with a pattern for the church.

Another prevalent idea connected with the "new hermeneutic" is that we need intelligent and highly-educated people to "interpret" the Bible for us. Most advocates of these theories like to use big words.

"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Corinthians 3:18, 19). Brethren, do not be intimidated by terms like 'hermeneutics' or 'epistemology'. If someone hears the word of Christ and does what He says, his house will stand (Matthew 7:21-27). Jesus said so. Let not your minds "be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3).

To the soldiers whose awestruck response to Jesus was, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" the

haughty self-appointed interpreters of the law replied: "Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed" (John 7:46-49).

Jesus disagreed: "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes" (Matthew 11:25). [See also Isaiah 35:8.]

Why do they call this 'new hermeneutic' 'new' when their free-thinking ideas actually are not new? In Western Culture, something 'new' is considered better than something 'old'. Who wants to promote something 'old'? But even that is nothing new! In the 'old' book of Jeremiah we read: "Thus says the Lord: 'Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.' But they said, 'We will not walk in it'" (Jeremiah 6:16).

Ridicule is poured on the 'old-fashioned' way we understood the Scriptures thirty years ago. Notice this quotation from the article cited above: "In the past few years in the churches of Christ, we have been plagued by a fast growing group among us who operate from a hermeneutic

which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Then Timothy is given a solemn directive: "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:1, 2).

Paul mentioned impostors. Now he explains that many will WANT to be deceived! "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:3,4).

We must abide in the word of Christ to be His disciples (John 8:31); His word will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). To the Romans, Paul wrote: "But God

be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (Romans 6:17). He told the Corinthians not to go beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6). To Timothy he wrote: "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13). An elder must hold "fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). John warned: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).

"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith -- to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen" (Romans 16:25-27).

Advocates of the 'new herme-

neutic' do not like commands. They say we should be 'Christ-centered' rather than 'command-centered'. But Jesus said: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

They also like to muddy the waters with regard to binding examples and logical conclusions from the Scriptures, by claiming that they are all based on subjective opinion. This is just a smoke screen to hide their basic denial that God's word is definitive and authoritative.

First, it must be understood that God's commandments include more than those portions of Scripture which are in the form of a direct command. Paul warned the Corinthians: "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 Corinthians 14:37). When Jesus said, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you," more is involved than direct commands. After He washed the disciples' feet He said, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). Peter explains: "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21). John af-

firms: "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6). With regard to Israel in the wilderness, Paul wrote: "Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted" (1 Corinthians 10:6); "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written down for our admonition" (1 Corinthians 10:11). James wrote: "My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience" (James 5:10). To the Philippians Paul said: "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (Philippians 3:17). To the Thessalonians he wrote: "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Jews" (1 Thessalonians 2:13, 14). To the Corinthians he wrote: "Now concerning the col-

lection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also" (1 Corinthians 16:1). Seven times in Revelation we read: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

We are also expected to draw logical conclusions from what the Scriptures say.

When the Pharisees condemned Jesus' disciples for plucking grain on the Sabbath, He asked them: "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?" (Matthew 12:3-5). Jesus expected them to draw logical conclusions from these examples.

When the Sadducees challenged the doctrine of the resurrection, Jesus told them: "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). He went on to ask: "Have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abra-

ham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matthew 22:31), "You are therefore greatly mistaken" (Mark 12:27). This passage teaches that there is a resurrection, although nothing is specifically said about a resurrection, because it requires a resurrection logically.

Paul "reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead" (Acts 17:2, 3). "And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4). Apollos "vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 18:24, 28).

Of course, some people reject logic and reason. Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray that he might "be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men" (2 Thessalonians 3:2) and referring to difficult passages, Peter writes: "in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16).

God has made a covenant with us. There is a 'form of doctrine' to which we must submit