

# **The Baptismal Regeneration / Believer's Baptism Debate**

A theological and historical overview of the most contested  
subject of the church age.

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## Chapter Eight

### The Subjective And Extra-biblical Arguments For Baptismal Regeneration

The controversy over *baptismal regeneration* will fall into two major categories for those making affirmations in its defense. There are those who insist that their views on sacramentalism have been derived objectively from the Scriptures alone, and those who proclaim authority for their position on mystical, emotional, or other extra-biblical grounds. We will discuss the latter group in this present chapter and the former in the forthcoming chapter. (see Reason # 15 in Chapter 6 of this present work).

There has always existed, within Christendom, a superstitious view of biblical authority and interpretation which can lead to a *talismanic* view of one's own heart, conscience, intuition or of the consensus of the Church as a community. We have observed this same error among the Jewish leaders in the NT. In addition to the written Torah, the Pharisees and rabbis recognized an oral Torah which comprised specific applications of the general principles of the written Torah. In Christ's day the oral traditions went beyond application to the establishment of an extra-textual orthodoxy which was assigned equal authority with the Scriptures. According to Christ, this practice literally resulted in the cancellation of the written Word of God (Matt. 15:2; Mark 7:9, 13; Col. 2:8).

This same error is being committed today in the name of *The Living Logos* or the *inner illumination of the Holy Spirit*. Some contemporary theologians attribute to themselves, or to the community of believers, the same authority that was possessed by the apostles. This present work, on the other hand, interprets the words *dynamis* (ability, power) and *exousia* (right, power, authority) within their contextual usage and not merely by their lexical definitions. In so doing, we can observe that the power and authority of the sacred text is of a different domain and thus not the same as the *exousia* of government (cf. Lk. 19:17), the Sanhedrin (Acts 9:14), or Pilate (Lk. 20:20). It is also different from the God-given power of self-determination in the believer (Acts 5:4) the satanic power of kings (Rev. 17:12), and the *powers that be* (Lk. 12:11; Rom. 13:1). It is not the same as the sphere of the state's dominion (Lk. 23:7), the domain of spirits (Eph. 2:2), nor of the spiritual powers (I Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16; I Pet. 3:22).

First, God possesses *exousia* as the source of all power and legality (Lk. 12:5; Acts 1:7; Jude 25; Rom. 9:21). Secondly, all natural forces derive their *exousia* from God (Rev. 6:8; 9:3, 10, 19; 16:9; 18:1). Thirdly, God's will also encompasses Satan's sphere of dominion (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13). Fourthly, God's *exousia* and *dynamis* are fully possessed by Jesus Christ in His deity (Matt. 28:18; Rev. 12:10).

That the Church has a power of self-determination is clearly seen in Acts 15. But this is a freedom to embrace as well as to reject error. When Christ prophesied the immediate entering in of false prophets, He was declaring that God would not with force prohibit error in the church (Mt. 7:15, 22, 23). It was the Church's task to defend itself from error (Jude 3). But by what rule? If there was not a rule distinct from the body of saints that would serve as an effective tool, then either the will of the saints would become the rule or else the will of the ecclesiastical hierarchy would become the authoritative canon law for the Church. In the latter case we would have a repetitious parallel to the Pharisees and Scribes negating the *exousia* of the sacred writings (Matt. 15:6, 9).

We hold that the Bible is the rule or canon for the Church. Because of our fleshly natures, we are not an extremely humble race. Therefore, we must take steps to protect ourselves from our own pride. Thus doing, we should attempt to require that none of our Christian doctrines will have originated with ourselves or our denomination. They must have originated with Christ and have been delivered to the Church via the original apostles and passed down through the Scriptures. Although the redeemed of the Church Age are universally *in Christ*, doctrines which originated from within that body, since the death of the apostles, are not catholic (universal).

Thus, the doctrinal *exousia* chain of command begins with the entire Trinity and is delivered to the Church through Christ and the Holy Spirit to the original apostles. Even before the Scriptures were complete the *apostolic tradition* had become a closed system of doctrine—

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them (Rom. 16:17).

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 he received of us (II Thess. 3:6).

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3; cf. Gal. 1:6-9).

It is the nature of a canon to be closed. But upon what grounds was the NT canon closed and how were the twenty-seven books therein chosen? *The Cambridge History Of The Bible* summarizes the process as follows:

...The Canon of the New Testament was the result of a long and gradual process in the course of which the books regarded as authoritative, inspired, and apostolic were selected out of a much larger body of literature. Such a process of selection necessarily involved both selectors and grounds on which the selection would be made.

...Selection thus involved not only comparison among books but also comparison with a norm viewed as relatively fixed. Before this norm, among early Christians regarded as the faith of the apostles, reached a relative fixity of expression it was not possible for a definite Canon to come into existence. About A.D. 170, when opponents of the enthusiastic movement known as Montanism endeavored to cut the ground from under it by rejecting the Gospel and Revelation of John, their own theological ideas had not incorporated Johannine insights, and their rejection of the Johannine books was destined to fall because the theology of the Church as a whole was coming to be increasingly Johannine. This is to say that the development of the Canon and the development of Christian theology were closely interrelated, and supported one another.

...The question of canonicity or, to put it more historically, authority—since the term *canon* was not used until the fourth century—did not and could not arise until the idea of orthodoxy had clearly arisen out of the second-century anti-gnostic debates.<sup>1</sup>

The early post-apostolic church sought to protect itself from error with a closed system of pre-canon orthodoxy known as the *apostolic tradition*. Since the actual term *canon* was not in use until the fourth century, instead we will use the word *authority*. The recognition of doctrinal authority can indeed be observed in the second-century anti-gnostic debates. The primary criterion in such debates was the usage of this closed system of doctrine among groups known to have held the traditional *faith of the apostles*.

John 14:26 was spoken by Christ to the Apostles when He proclaimed that the Holy Ghost would *teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you*. In John 16:13 Christ said that the Spirit of Truth would guide the apostles into *all truth*. This was a promise of total accuracy based upon total recall of what was spoken by Christ. We understand that neither we nor the community of believers possess such an authority today. We only have the information that was

delivered to us through the apostles, as Paul said to Timothy: *And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also* (II Tim. 2:2). Therefore believers are members of *the household of God; and are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone* (Eph. 2:19b-21). Jude called the NT body of doctrines *the faith* and exhorted Christians to *...earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints* (Jude 3).

Clement, the third bishop of the congregation at Rome, who was conversant with the apostles, refers to a pre-canon closed system of orthodoxy in his First Epistle to the Corinthians:

[Chap. XLII] The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ has done so from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand.<sup>2</sup>

Ignatius of the church of Antioch in Syria is remembered as a co-disciple of the Apostle John along with Polycarp. He also refers to a pre-canon orthodoxy in his Epistle to the Magnesians:

<sup>1</sup> *The Cambridge History Of The Bible: From the Beginnings to Jerome*, P. R. Ackroyd And C. F. Evens, Editors (Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1970), Vol. I, pp. 284- 285.

<sup>2</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: First Epistle of Clement* [Chap. XLII], Rev Alexander Roberts, D.D. and James Donaldson, LL.D., Editors (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), Vol. I, p. 16.

(Chap. XIII) Study, therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and of the apostles, that so all things, whatsoever ye do, may prosper, both in the flesh and spirit, in faith and love....<sup>3</sup>

Thus, true catholic unity must be based on a closed system of apostolic doctrine.

In his Epistle to the Romans, Ignatius distinguishes between his authority as a bishop and the authority of the apostles:

(Chap. IV.) I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you. They were apostles of Jesus Christ, but I am the very least [of believers].<sup>4</sup>

Irenaeus, the disciple of Polycarp, states the case for us in the preface to his third book *Against Heresies* wherein he points out that his truth is qualified in that it did not originate with himself:

But in this, the third book, I shall adduce proofs from the Scriptures, so that I may come behind in nothing of what thou hast enjoined; yea, that over and above what thou dost reckon upon, thou mayest receive from me the means of combating and vanquishing those who, in whatever manner, are propagating falsehood. For the love of God, being rich and ungrudging, confers upon the suppliant more than he can ask from it. Call to mind, then, the things which I have stated in the two preceding books, and, taking these in connection with them, thou shalt have from me a very copious refutation of all the heretics; and faithfully and strenuously shalt thou resist them in defence of the only true and life-giving faith, which the Church has received from the apostles and imparted to her sons. For the Lord of all gave to His apostles the power of the Gospel, through whom also we have known the truth, that is, the doctrine of the Son of God; to whom also did the Lord declare: "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me, and Him that sent Me."<sup>5</sup>

Again in (Chap. I) Irenaeus states that:

We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.<sup>6</sup>

He describes heretics as those who claimed to have received new truth from God to be added to the apostolic tradition and demonstrates the task of the presbyters as that of keeping the system closed:

(Chap. II.) But, again, when we refer them to that tradition which originates from the apostles, [and] which is preserved by means of the successions of presbyters in the Churches, they object to tradition, saying that they themselves are wiser not merely than the presbyters,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*, [Chap. XIII "To Be Established In Faith And Unity"], Vol. 1, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans*, [Chap. IV "Allow Me To Fall Prey To The Wild Beasts"], Vol. 1, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Irenaeus Against Heresies, Book III* [Preface], Vol. 1, p. 414.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., [Book III, Chap.I.1], Vol. 1, p. 414.

but even than the apostles, because they have discovered the unadulterated truth.<sup>7</sup>

Irenaeus tells us that it is this closed system that makes Christian doctrine public and therefore catholic (universal):

(Chap. III.) It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times; those who neither taught nor knew of anything like what these [heretics] rave about. For if the apostles had known hidden mysteries, which they were in the habit of imparting to "the perfect" apart and privily from the rest, they would have delivered them especially to those to whom they were also committing the Churches themselves.<sup>8</sup>

He further illustrates this point by listing in succession the first twelve bishops of the Church at Rome in relation to their obligation to keep the system closed:

(Chap. III.) ....In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.<sup>9</sup>

Irenaeus continues by using Polycarp to illustrate the *sole authority* of the apostolic tradition:

(Chap. III.) But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth....and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time....He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles.<sup>10</sup>

This is precisely why Irenaeus considers it unnecessary to seek for extra-apostolic information regarding the will of God:

(Chap. IV.) Since therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth...<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., [Book III, Chap.II.2], Vol. 1, p. 415.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., [Book III, Chap. III.1], Vol. 1, p. 415.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., [Book III, Chap. III.3], Vol. 1, p. 416.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., [Book III, Chap. III.4], Vol. 1, p. 416.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., [Book III, Chap. IV.1], Vol. 1, p. 416.

This same idea of the sole authority of the apostolic tradition is equivalent to the belief in the *sole authority* of the Scriptures for faith and doctrine. Irenaeus makes this very conclusion:

(Chap. V.) Since, therefore, the tradition from the apostles does thus exist in the Church, and is permanent among us, let us revert to the Scriptural proof furnished by those apostles who did also write the Gospel, in which they recorded the doctrine regarding God, pointing out that our Lord Jesus Christ is the truth, and that no lie is in him.<sup>12</sup>

*Sole authority* would mean, for Irenaeus, a closed, fixed system of doctrine to which no theological truth claims could be added nor taken away:

True knowledge is [that which consists in] the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place, and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved, without any forgoing of Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine, and neither receiving addition nor [suffering] curtailment [in the truths which she believes]; and [it consists in] reading [the word of God] without falsification, and a lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures, both without danger and without blasphemy...<sup>13</sup>

We will note one final quotation wherein Irenaeus defines orthodoxy as the true Church standing for the closed system of apostolic tradition through the written Scriptures:

(Chap. XX.) Now all these [heretics] are of much later date than the bishops to whom the apostles committed the Churches; which fact I have in the third book taken all pains to demonstrate. It follows, then, as a matter of course, that these heretics aforementioned, since they are blind to the truth, and deviate from the [right] way, will walk in various roads; and therefore the footsteps of their doctrine are scattered here and there without agreement or connection. But the path of those belonging to the Church circumscribes the whole world, as possessing the sure tradition from the apostles, and gives unto us to see that the faith of all is one and the same, since all receive one and the same God the Father, and believe in the same dispensation regarding the incarnation of the Son of God, and are cognizant of the same gift of the Spirit and are conversant with the same commandments, and preserve the same form of ecclesiastical constitution, and expect the same advent of the Lord, and await the same salvation of the complete man, that is, of the soul and body. And undoubtedly the preaching of the Church is true and steadfast, in which one and the same way of salvation is shown throughout the whole world. For to her is entrusted the light of God; and therefore the "wisdom" of God, by means of which she saves all men, "is declared in [its] going forth; it uttereth [its voice] faithfully in the streets, is preached on the tops of the walls, and speaks continually in the gates of the city." For the Church preaches the truth everywhere, and she is the seven-branched candlestick which bears the light of Christ.... Now, such are all the heretics, and those

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., [Book III, Chap. V.1], Vol. 1, p. 417.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., [Book IV, Chap. XXXIII.8], Vol. 1, p. 508.

who imagine that they have hit upon something more beyond the truth.... It behoves us, therefore, to avoid their doctrines, and to take careful heed lest we suffer any injury from them; but to flee to the Church, and be brought up in her bosom, and be nourished with the Lord's Scriptures.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the use of the *kerygma* (proclamation) as an overall term to denote the substance of the message of the New Testament, and a skeleton framework underlying it, is well founded. Paul's Gospel was the same as the preaching of Jesus (Rom. 16:25), and any departure from it was to be avoided (Rom. 16:17; II Thes. 3:6; Acts 20:25-31). Thus, the true *kerygma* was committed to the Church originally through the preaching of the apostles (Titus 1:3; II Tim. 4:17).

Therefore, there is not a divine extra-biblical *kerygma* to be recognized by the Church today. If there is, we will never have the inerrant ability to distinguish it from the claims of false apostles (II Cor. 11:13). Our only hope of getting close to the truth is the *sole authority* of the Bible. The contemporary game of *preacher roulette* is one wherein the sinner gambles his soul on a guess as to which *prophet* is really speaking the oracles of God.

The New Testament Church has an *exousia* (authority) which is a freedom for the community, but this is not a freedom to correct the Scriptures with spiritual authority in the name of the *Living Logos*. When the Apostle Paul spoke by *concession* or *permission* (*suggnome*), he was only offering personal advice and made it clear that this was not a commandment from God (I Cor. 7:6). Though Timothy and Irenaeus were indwelt by the *Living Logos*, they received no new doctrines that were not already handed down from the apostles—*And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also* (II Tim. 2:2). The Christian community is free to enter into error but not authorized to pontificate that the error is a *revelational mandate* from Christ. When the Christian community rejected the heliocentric view of the solar system, it proved to the world that the canon for the church was not the consensus of the community nor of the hierarchs. The community's freedom is from the curse of the law (Rom 6:14) and from the theological commandments of men (Col. 2:20-22), but not a freedom and authority to issue new commandments (I Tim. 4:1-4). Thus, community *exousia* is not intrinsic divine autonomy from the authority of Scripture. Contemporary Christian gnosticism seems to have developed a freedom along the lines of the extremists at Corinth (I Cor. 5:1 ff.) wherein men established their own autonomy in moral and theological issues as if God had certainly approved. In the apocryphal Acts, as is often the case today, *exousia* was a mystically extorted power deployed for one's own ends.

Although God reveals Himself in nature (Rom. 1:20) and in the conscience of man (Rom. 1:18, 19), these revelations contain no doctrines which are not already declared in Scripture (Rom. 2:14). We are often charged with limiting God to the content of the Scriptures and thus putting Him in a box. On the contrary, we know that God is infinite and therefore cannot be limited. However, we would be attempting to limit God if we proclaimed that He is incapable of placing scriptural boundaries on what He will allow us to know regarding His will for mankind. The Apostle Paul was a limited

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., [Book V, Chap. XX.1], Vol. 1, pp. 547, 548.

agnostic. Although there is infinitely more to God than is revealed in Scripture, we should consider with Paul that extrabiblical information about the will of God is past finding out (Rom. 11:33; James 4:13-16). So it is not that the infinite God is limited to this Book. The limitation is that we are small and finite, and therefore, our understanding is confined to the boundaries of the canon.

The Body of Christ has a mission and the Scriptures contain all the doctrinal furnishings necessary to perform every work within that objective:

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 perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works (II Tim. 3:16,17).

Never let it be once said that God cannot reveal new truth beyond the Scriptures. However, it would be limiting God to insist that He must reveal extrabiblical truth to us whether or not He desires to do so. It would be limiting God to say that He cannot close the canon.

But there is also the problem with the thousands of variant readings of the Greek manuscripts of the NT. We must understand that a variation does not constitute a corruption. Otherwise, Christ and the apostles would not have used the Septuagint and the Hebrew Text interchangeably. Geisler and Nix comment on how the variations are counted:

There is an ambiguity in saying there are some 200,000 variants in the existing manuscripts of the New Testament, since these represent only 10,000 places in the New Testament. If one single word is misspelled in 3,000 different manuscripts, this is counted as 3,000 variants or readings.<sup>15</sup>

Church historian, Phillip Schaff, concluded that only 400 of the 150,000 variant readings caused doubt about the textual meaning, and only 50 of these were of great significance. In the manuscripts available in his day, he could not find one variation which altered, *an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture teaching.*<sup>16</sup>

Laying aside the issue of canonical authority, there is the question of interpretation. We should require of ourselves to refrain from a talismanic view of our own feelings or of the consensus of the Christian community. In order for the canon to be a public measuring rod, it must self-contain the key to its own interpretation. This is a concept that most of the earliest Church fathers failed to completely comprehend. We should require that our method of interpretation, as well as the revelation we use, be objectively outside ourselves. We should realize that a correct guess regarding biblical meaning is absolutely improbable. It is rational to conclude that the writers had a particular meaning in mind for each text. It is also reasonable to conclude that they intended for that meaning to be ascertained. We will live long enough to uncover only a portion of the answers to all Bible questions. However, this does not mean that the

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<sup>15</sup> Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), p. 361.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Schaff, *Companion to the Greek Testament and the English Version*, Revised Edition (New York: Harper Brothers, 1883), p. 177.

answers are not there. An objective historical-grammatical analysis of a text will give us more truth than any other alternative available. If we cannot find the hermeneutical key to the correct interpretation of a text, we should refuse to guess or look inside ourselves for a mystical key. The true meaning of a text must be contained within the text itself and within the coherent context of the entire canon. Otherwise, our correct understanding would require a further revelation which some contemporary scholars refer to as "illumination." On the contrary, the true Gospel does not need lighting, it is light—

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (II Cor. 4:4).

Furthermore, the Word of God does not need lighting, for it is the illumination of God when properly read and understood—*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path* (Ps. 119:105). It would be a wise course of action if each member of the Christian community were to read and hear the Scriptures with heed, caution and discretion, attempting to recognize when the preacher or the community is departing from textual authority.

Our hermeneutical approach to a text should not therefore be dialectic—i.e. we do not bring our objections to a text as an antithesis and work toward a compromise position between it and ourselves. There is a vast difference between assigning a new meaning to a text and deriving a further interpretation from it. If change or progression occurs in our understanding, it must be the text that changes us and not ourselves who change the text.

When contradictions seem apparent in the Bible, as in the case of Paul's *faith without works* and James' *faith plus works*, we must have confidence that God's true Word cannot be self-contradictory and that two contradictory positions cannot simultaneously be true. If the Bible is infallible and coherent in matters of faith and doctrine, then there is something that we may have failed to observe. Paul said we are *justified by faith without the deeds of the law* (Rom. 3:28) while James proclaimed that we are justified by works and *not by faith only* (James 2:24). Paul described faith without works as very much alive (Rom. 4:5) while James affirmed that the same faith without works is "dead" (James 2:17). Paul declared that Abraham was not justified by works in the sight of God (Rom. 4:2) while James proposes that Abraham was justified by works (James 2:21).

What are we missing here? The key to Romans chapter four is: *but not before God* (4:2), while the key to James chapter two is: *show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works* (James 2:18). Paul is speaking of justification in the sight of God while James is addressing justification in the sight of man: *show me...and I will show you*. God can see your faith when you are sitting silently on a bench, eating an apple. But others can recognize us as Christians only by our testimonies and deeds. Therefore, there is no contradiction between these texts.

Allegorizing the Bible in order to teach baptismal regeneration from every mention of moisture or water is a technique which, if valid, would require divine inspiration and inerrancy on the part of the interpreter. Again, *The Cambridge History of the Bible* traces the origin of this technique:

But we may regard as certain the conclusion that the New Testament was first subject to allegorising, not within the bounds of the Catholic Church, but among the heterodox gnostic sects which flourished

outside the Church or only on its periphery, and that orthodox Christian writers only adopted the allegorisation of the New Testament by way of defense, in order to extract orthodox doctrine from it...The Gnostics on the whole accepted such of the books of the New Testament as were in general circulation in the second century, and accepted them willingly, though they claimed the right to supplement them by their own secret traditions. It is among them that we can first discern the allegorisation of the New Testament. Tertullian tells us that allegories, parables and riddles represent *par excellence* the heretics' way of interpreting the New Testament. The Valentinians in Irenaeus' day regularly allegorised the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. The Gnostics interpreted the parable of the Foolish Virgins as referring to the five (deceptive) senses.<sup>17</sup>

We should also consider the fact that the inner witness of the *Living Logos* and the outer witness of the Scriptures are the same in content. I Jn. 5:10, 11 states:

He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself [inner witness]: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar because he believeth not the record [outer witness] that God gave of his son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his son.

Verse 13 states: These things have I written [outer witness] unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

The problem is this: if the Bible is not the sole authority for faith and doctrine, our only alternative is to find absolute information about God's will from another source. Many a self-proclaimed prophet today will arise and proclaim that the *Living Logos* has chosen to reveal this new information through him or through his denomination.

The *Church Fathers* of the earliest centuries of Christianity developed varied interpretations of the apostolic writings. Yet there was an understanding that the parameters of argument, within a legitimate debate regarding heresy, were the traditions of the original apostles. The larger question is one of whether the apostles left a clue regarding the interpretation of their traditions. We hold that Scriptures are self-interpreting and do not require a further mystical, revelational key in order to be understood.

The most perplexing element of contemporary Christendom is its multi-varied doctrinal traditions. Most of the high points of Church history have arisen when great men of God made it their goal to stand as truly as they could upon the Word of God. But after experiencing a degree of success, and many seeming blessings from God, these same men often fell prey to the notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to use their personal opinions about almost everything as the new standard for the universal Church. From this fallacy there would arise a tradition among their followers based upon these extra-biblical *convictions*. The next generation of their followers would introduce this as a doctrinal tradition based upon a biographical analysis of the great man's life and personal testimony. This would establish into the movement a mystical *knowledge of God* which

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., *The Cambridge History Of The Bible*, Vol. I, pp. 416, 417.

could not find its source in Scripture. Thus arose the fallacy that *our critics must find a biblical prohibition against this teaching or a direct command not to teach this tradition*. The impossibility of proving a negative was considered an ultimate proof for the extra-biblical tradition.

After the dogma was well established, it honestly seemed ridiculous to suggest that it was not revealed by God Himself. Such traditional misconceptions became fixed dogmas resulting in exegetical blindness to certain key passages of Scripture.

It has been argued that those who have held to *baptismal regeneration* throughout the Church age have proven themselves by having been greatly endowed with spiritual gifts. The Apostle Paul taught that truth and spirituality could not be measured solely by the gifts of the Spirit. In I Cor. 1:4-7 he thanked God that the Corinthians were enriched in *all utterance* and *all knowledge* and that they had *come behind in no gift*. He then proceeded to discuss how the general church membership was carnal and unspiritual: *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ* (I Cor. 3:1). Thus, the most spiritually gifted church mentioned in the NT was also the most unspiritual and carnal, being plagued with heresies among them (I Cor. 11:19).

On the other hand, spirituality can be detected by the fruits of the Spirit—*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law* (Gal. 5:22, 23).<sup>18</sup> A further study of Scripture will reveal how each of these fruits can be convincingly feigned to the deception of many. Therefore, the searching Christian should look for them in a context of Scriptural truth, particularly as it pertains to the purity of the Gospel.

Love is not only a fruit of the Spirit, but also one of the gifts of the Spirit. Where there is no godly love there is no serious degree of spirituality. In I Cor. 13:1 Paul stated that if he had the tongues of men and angels and had not love, he would *become as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal*. Obviously, such a gift is not the ultimate measure of spirituality. In verse two he proclaimed that if he had the gift of prophecy, inerrant knowledge, theological understanding, plus the faith to move mountains, he would be nothing without love. Again, these are not ultimate measures of spirituality. The value of faith is not measured by its intensity but by its object. If one had the greatest faith in the world that the air would support his weight, it would not. However, if he had the least

amount of faith in the world that the ground would support him, it would. The smallest amount of faith will save a sinner if its object is the finished work of Christ accomplished upon the cross of Calvary. In verse three, Paul stated that if he gave all his goods to the poor and died a martyr's death, his life would be an insufficient standard for his followers if there was no true spirituality.

A key to detecting true spiritual love is its commitment to biblical truth, for love *rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth* (I Cor. 13:6). A Christian should be suspicious when someone is always testifying of an intimate relationship with Jesus and the Spirit while simultaneously expressing apathy toward the doctrinal truths of God's

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<sup>18</sup> There are many more than nine fruits of the spirit but it will not be our task to study or list them here.

Word. Christ wants to have an intimate relationship with us, but this experience is not to become a basis for theological or spiritual pontification about extra-biblical issues.

Likewise, spirituality and truth cannot be measured solely by the real, or feigned, power of the Spirit. Samson's Nazarite vows were three-fold: he was to abstain from strong drink; from touching dead carcasses, and from cutting his hair. Throughout his adult life we see him at drinking parties, gambling, living with ungodly women, eating honey out of a dead carcass. Almost all, if not all, of his supernatural victories were acts of personal vindication over losing a bet or over one of his women. But in each case the power of the Spirit came upon him. In Judges 15 he allowed Israel to bind him with new cords and deliver him to the Philistines. In verse fourteen *the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him* and he brake the cords, picked up the jawbone of a dead carcass (in defiance to God's revealed will), and slew a thousand Philistines. Could he have used the

*power of the Spirit* on his life at that moment as proof of his spirituality, doctrinal accuracy, and devoted obedience? Certainly not. In Judges 16 his hair had been cut and his eyes had been gouged out by the Philistines. His last request to God was for the supernatural power to commit suicide while getting vengeance for his eyes: *And Samson called unto the Lord and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes* (Judges 16:28). When did he ever use his supernatural strength for God and country? Yes, God used it for Israel and for His glory, but Samson's motive was always one of personal vengeance. Does his death constitute proof that it is sometimes God's will for a man to commit suicide? Certainly not.

One great shortcut to approaching truth is systematically to eliminate that which is not true. This can be partially accomplished by an understanding of the stumblingblocks to clear theological thinking. Negative thinking has gotten too much bad publicity of late. The Bible repeatedly contrasts that which is true with that which is not true (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8, 9; Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:28; Ps. 1). Part of the definition of *positive* is that it is a solution to a negative alternative. Positive cancer research has to focus on the nature of the negative processes of malignant cells. With this in mind, let us remind ourselves of the factors which could mislead us in our theological thinking. The following will not be a study in proper hermeneutics as much as an identification of improper hermeneutics and invalid tests for theological authority.

Thinkers have often elevated feeling to a level of theological authority. Feelings are usually vague, ill-defined, lack precision and conflict with one another—e.g. mixed emotions. Without neglecting the fact that God created us with feelings, He has never established them as a theological authority. Therefore, we should never make authoritative theological affirmations on the basis of feelings.

Custom and acquired tradition can also be misleading. Traditions are customs which have been preserved for generations with deep cultural roots. They may or may not agree with truth, but they are not valid criterion for truth. We do not allow for the antiquity of ancient forms of cannibalism to argue for the validity of their tradition. It has been traditional in some ancient societies to place a living wife into the funeral fire of her deceased husband, but tradition is not an argument for the validity of the custom.

We often hear that a position is true because it has *stood the test of time*. Theology is often debated merely from this criterion. If this were a valid test for truth,

then many false superstitions of the past would be ultimately vindicated. The geocentric theory of the universe is much older than the heliocentric theory, as well as the theory that the earth is flat.

Intuition, on the other hand, can result in the discovery of truth (as in the case of Thomas Edison), but it is the objective discovery of the truth that becomes the reliable test. In Edison's case, intuition was the source of truth but not the test of truth. Verification was not obtained in the intuitive experience, for there was no way of knowing whether or not the light bulb would work. The idea had to be tested in some nonintuitive manner in a laboratory. In the same sense, the Apostolic message was received subjectively but was confirmed objectively through the Apostolic gifts—

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*; God also bearing *them* witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will (Heb. 2:3, 4)?

Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds (II Cor. 12:12).

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars (Rev. 2:1, 2).

The false apostles would claim to receive revelations from God in addition to the doctrines delivered to the church by the original apostles. Thus, they could claim the inerrancy of the Scriptures plus the inerrancy of their additional revelations. Those who claim apostolic authority today fail to realize that legitimate revelation from God is a source of truth, but not a criterion for truth. There are thousands of revelation claims throughout Church history. All true revelations should offer a process of verification or criteria. The Bible offers a combination of tests for verification: fulfilled prophecy, apostolic sign gifts, and consistency and coherence with all the other claims of the sacred texts.

Jesus Christ did not expect hearers to believe Him apart from objective, coherent criteria. He claimed to be a source of truth, but professed that the claim alone was not conclusive:

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true (Jn. 5:30, 31).

Therefore, He offered a combination of criteria. First, the testimony of John the Baptist as fulfilled prophecy—

There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true (Jn. 5:32).

Secondly, there was His own objective works which could be empirically examined—

But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me (Jn. 5:36).<sup>19</sup>

Thirdly, the testimony of God the Father—

And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape (Jn. 5:37).

And finally, the test of coherency with the rest of the sacred Scriptures—

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me (Jn. 5:39).

Many modern claimants of direct revelation and personal inerrancy offer the claim alone as proof of authority. How many can offer the combination of criteria as did Christ and the Apostles?

The following discussion may seem elementary to a university graduate, but for the sake of the average Christian we will evaluate several of the roadblocks to sound biblical thinking.

Rarely someone might appeal to instinct as a revelation from God. Yet the Adamic nature, which is instinctive, is not a revelation of God's will. A discrepancy may therefore occur when *instincts* seem to conflict, as with forms of oppression. Neither the *instinct* to oppress nor the *instinct* to be free of oppression can appeal to instinct as the test of truth.

Still others may cite the consensus of the *mainstream* as opposed to the *radical fringe*—e.g. *Seventy million Frenchmen cannot be wrong*. It is the old Latin proverb: *vox populi, vox dei* (the voice of the people is the voice of God). In America we have the *Bill of Rights* in order that an individual may defend himself against the will of the majority. These first ten amendments to the Constitution assume that the majority will at times be wrong. It is often falsely assumed that if a majority of accepted people hold to a theological position, it is *ipso facto* true. King David employed this fallacy in carrying out a most noble objective. First, he conducted a survey of the mainstream—*And David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader* (I Chron. 13:1). Secondly, he took a census of the citizens—

And David said unto all the congregation of Israel, If it seem good unto you, and that it be of the LORD our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren every where, that are left in all the land of Israel, and with

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<sup>19</sup> (e.g. Matt. 11:1-5; 20-23) “And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities. Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them...Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”

them also to the priests and Levites which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us (13:2).

Thirdly, he stated his noble objective: *And let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we enquired not at it in the days of Saul* (13:3). Finally, his false premise was achieved—*And all the congregation said that they would do so: for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people* (13:5). From these factors of confirmation they proceeded to devise an unauthorized method of carrying out the objective—*And they carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab: and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart* (13:7). If they had consulted the Scriptures they would have read:

...after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath [Levites] in the tabernacle of the congregation (Nu. 4:15a; cf. Ex. 25:12-15).

David reinforced his judgment with pragmatism as he observed the success of the project being carried out by multitudes with pomp, dynamic music, mighty zeal, and magnificent ceremonial—

And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets (13:8).

In the NT, *they of the circumcision* will use the same reinforcement to confirm ritual salvation and salvation by personal righteousness—

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:2, 3).

When the oxen stumbled, Uzzah put his hand on the ark to keep it from falling and was immediately stricken dead (13:9, 10). David was amazed that God would be so displeased over such a small technicality, and he fearfully began to question how this project should be executed (13:11, 12). So he went back to square one and consulted the Scriptures alone before proceeding. He determined that such an objective necessitated a prepared place (15:1), a prepared method (15:2, 15), and Scriptural instruction (15:12, 13). So with the priests in their proper places (15:14, 15), and sacrifices offered (5:26), the project became a success because the mind of God was properly consulted—

And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the LORD (15:15).

Again, David used pomp singing, musical instruments, zeal and enthusiasm, but he did not use these as a test of truth (15:16). Doing the wrong thing with a noble motive will not transform it into the right thing—i.e. *The plowing of the wicked is sin* (Prov. 21:4b).

Pragmatism is the theory that an idea is true if it works. The argument has been made that great churches and movements were built from the doctrine of *baptismal regeneration*, whereas the advocates of *believer's baptism* constitute a radical fringe. It is argued that the workability of an idea validates it. Such a criterion is very useful in scientific research as one proceeds from theory to substantiation, but the theological

difficulty is in the inadequate definitions of *workability* and *consequences*. In the final analysis, it is one's value system which determines the workability of an idea. If head-counts, magnificent buildings, and stained-glass windows are the measure, then there is an argument for sacramentalism. However, on the other hand, it is the scriptural assurance of eternal life that works for an advocate of *believer's baptism*—

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God (I Jn. 5:13).

Yet a communist, capitalist, socialist, Nazi, religious zealot, or an atheist can simultaneously appeal to the workability of his solution.

Theologians who claim extra-biblical doctrinal information from God will argue that additional revelation is appropriate as long as it is consistent with the Bible. It is argued that infant baptism is valid because we cannot find a Scripture verse that commands us to not baptize infants. It is claimed that any extra-biblical innovation which does not contradict the Bible is therefore authorized. Let us illustrate with a series of statements which do not contradict one another: *Our church baptizes infants; the sun shines; today is Sunday; chariots have wheels; the Roman Empire governs*. Although these statements do not contradict, they nevertheless do not cohere, and therefore, prove nothing about infant baptism. Discovering contradictions will most often prove falsehood, for the detection of falsehood is an important facet in the discovery of truth. However, much more than the mere elimination of contradiction is necessary for testing the validity of a truth claim.

We have referred to *coherence* which, in theology, requires that truth claims be more than consistent. They must cohere with an integrated whole (facts of Scripture and history), not just compatible within themselves, but with every other teaching of Scripture. A good theologian will use coherence as a prime criterion of a truth claim. Actually, coherence is the nature of truth as well as its criterion.

We can often observe someone using emotive language as an argument for a truth claim. If he can appear outraged or deeply convicted, people are supposed to assume the credibility of his assertion. Referring to one's dearly departed mother as having held this position, (e.g. *baptismal regeneration*), can throw his adversary off balance. Referring to advocates of *believer's baptism* as *radical, frivolous, unsophisticated, hateful, fringe, uneducated* and *unrecognized* is to use words which possess no value except to incite emotions against their truth claims. We are philosophically opposed to communism. But to call a man a *dirty communist* is not an argument but an expression of contempt. The word means *the common ownership of the means of production*, but this definition does not lend itself to the use of emotive language. Debaters learn to describe their own refusal to compromise as *conviction*, while their opponents refusal is *stubborn, rebellious, close-minded and stiff-necked*. In either case, a valid argument for truth has not been offered.

We must also learn to avoid the fallacy which reasons that what is true of any part separately is also true of the whole. It might be argued that if Augustine was so extremely correct about other theological affirmations, then his position on *baptismal regeneration* must also be reliable. Or, this fallacy might affirm that if Thomas Muncer, of Mulhausen, in Thuringia was a criminal anarchist and an Anabaptist, then all Anabaptists must be advocates of lawlessness and therefore incorrect in their views on baptism.

Having the most outstanding Greek scholar on a faculty does not prove that your seminary has the most outstanding teaching staff.

On the other hand, there is also the opposite fallacy which reasons that whatever is true of the whole must also be true of each part separately. Because one is part of the nation's leading theological faculty does not make him the leading textual critic of the land. One cannot argue his point by reminding us that he was on the staff of such-and-such theological seminary.

Another fallacy is one which bypasses the issues under consideration by citing the fact that many advocates of the favored persuasion have been persecuted throughout the ages. This is an appeal to our sympathy and pity. Sympathy is virtuous and should guide many of our actions, but we should never let it obscure the truth of God's Word or be used as a test for truth.

We avoid still another pitfall when we observe someone departing from the point at issue to appeal instead to prestige, awe, or cultural elitism. This fallacy is committed when one argues that cultured and refined Christians of distinction will hold to a certain truth claim.

Almost everyone is familiar with the fallacy which shifts the discussion from the truth-claim under consideration to the assassination of the opponent's character. Even if one's own position is correct, this is never a valid form of argument. The personal character of a person has no essential relation to the factuality of his truth-claim. The level of a person's post-secondary education (if any) is totally unrelated to the credibility of his evidence. The reader should note again the number of times this fallacy has been used in the baptism debates cited in the previous chapters of this present work.

Then there is the argument from force when one reminds us that he has the power to persecute or ruin us if we do not embrace his position. Power and authority do not constitute criteria for a truth claim. The power to punish someone can corrupt thinking and logic almost effortlessly.

We have already observed, in previous chapters the contention that if one's adversary cannot disprove a thesis, it is therefore established as true. For instance, it has been argued that though the Bible does not command the baptism of infants, the burden of proof is on the advocates of *believer's baptism* to prove from Scripture that the Bible forbids it. The burden of proof should always fall upon the one who is proposing a thesis, and not the adversary. Under the U.S. Bill of Rights, one is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. But when putting forth a thesis, one cannot prove his affirmation valid on the grounds that it cannot be disproved. A proposition must be reinforced by positive evidence, not by the absence of it.<sup>20</sup> This fallacy results when arguing from possibility to actuality. The fallacy begins by arguing the omnipotence of God. Who would deny that an all-powerful God could deliver the saving work of Christ to an infant through baptism? It is argued that if it is possible for God to do this then it is actual that He does.. We should keep two principles in hand at all times: it is the one who affirms who must validate; and lack of evidence on one side

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<sup>20</sup> John 10:27-29 affirms that no creature can pluck a believer out of Christ's or the Father's hand. The opponent of eternal salvation by grace through faith alone will argue that the passage does not say that the believer cannot jump out of the father's hand. Thus, a consuming viewpoint is dogmatically based on what the passage does not say and the burden of proof is placed on one who must prove from Scripture that the believer cannot bail out of God's love.

does not constitute evidence for the contrary side of the question at hand. (e.g. A refutation of the theory of evolution does not establish creationism as a fact). Though disestablishment of an opposing view is a step toward the truth, it is not a test for truth.

We must also guard ourselves against an appeal to passions and prejudices, of which human reason is always vulnerable. Hence, we should not reject a truth claim simply because it would cause our dear old mothers and grandmothers to roll over in their graves. Many false religions hold their constituents captive by the use of this fallacy. No one desires to be shunned by his peers. One would like to see himself on the inside looking out rather than on the outside with his nose against the window viewing the mainstream dining in acceptability and dignity. The reason many post-secondary students so easily convert to atheism, agnosticism or pluralism when first entering college is that this is considered a badge of intelligence and abstract thinking .

Still another pitfall is the error in thinking wherein one establishes or disestablishes the wrong point. Instead of proving proposition (A), one proves affirmation (B)—i.e. *I once suffered as a missionary to China so therefore my position on baptism deserves the highest credibility*. Or, instead of overturning thesis (C), point (D) is impeached—e.g. *Pastor Smo's position on baptism is unworthy of consideration because he has spent his career in the comfort of a parsonage and has never undergone the test of hunger and hostile persecution*. This is a fallacy of irrelevance which, when committed in a court of law (i.e. answering a different question than the lawyer has asked) receives instruction from the judge to be responsive to the particular question that was put forth or else be held in contempt.

We should also be aware of the argument that because thesis (B) followed incident (A) then the former was the root and cause of the latter—i.e. it has occasionally been argued that whereas the rebellion at Muncer was conducted by uneducated peasants who held to re-baptism, the thesis of *believer's baptism* is a position held primarily by a radical, uneducated, culturally deprived subculture who are an insignificant fringe outside the mainstream of religious society.

Then there is the compound question which assumes a previous question to have already been answered—e.g. *Have you stopped hating paedobaptists?* Either a positive or a negative answer is self-incriminating and a refusal to answer is deemed a denial. Another example is: *How do you account for your passion to divide the Body of Christ over this issue?*; or, *Who died and made you the judge of the universe?*; or, *Does your mother know that you condemn us all to hell?* This fallacy is usually followed with, *He could not look me in the eye and give me a "yes" or "no" answer.*

A pulpit orator will often use an analogy to illustrate a point in his sermon. But a fallacy is committed if the illustration is used to prove a truth claim. In such a case one would attempt to refute *believer's baptism* by pointing out that there are those who believe that baptism is the gospel and those who hold that ritual baptism is dispensationally not for today at all. The next step would be to depict the advocate of *believer's baptism* as an attempt at compromise between these two extremes— e.g. *This reminds me of the man during the Civil War who tried to be friends with both sides. So, he wore gray pants and a blue shirt. Instead of making peace, they shot at him from both directions.* Though this analogy may correctly illustrate the nature of compromise, it does not prove that *believer's baptism*, or any other proposition, is a compromise of the truth.

An equally dangerous fallacy is the attempt to overthrow a truth claim by tracing it to an embarrassing source. If a known fornicator insists that H<sub>2</sub>O is water, could we overthrow his truth claim by pointing out that he is living in disobedience to God? Of course not. The source of a thesis is not relevant to its truthfulness.

We must also guard ourselves against the error of using an authority outside of his field as proof for a truth claim. We cannot prove the existence of God by pointing out that an internationally renowned scientist believed in Him. If he was not a theologian or a philosopher of religion, we would therefore need to review his reasons for believing in the existence of a deity.

On the other hand, we must also not use an authority even within his given field of expertise as proof for a truth claim on the basis of his degree and credentials. If anyone really is an expert on a given subject, he should be willing to provide documented evidence for his thesis and conclusion. No one is right simply because he is a recognized authority. In theology, he must justify his position with the facts of Scripture.

We would be most wise to also watch for contradictions which completely cancel each other out. Self-contradiction is almost always self-refuting—e.g. *What if an irresistible force met an immovable object?* If there exists an irresistible force, there cannot exist an immovable object. If an immovable object exists, then there is no such thing as an irresistible force. We see this fallacy committed when one insists: *We do not believe that baptism saves you, but you are not saved until you are baptized.* Or, *We believe that salvation is 100% free but you must forsake everything and commit everything in order to obtain it.*<sup>21</sup> If someone in a college or university setting contradicts himself completely, he will not impress his professor by labeling the contradiction a *qualification* of his original premise. One should refrain from using the term *qualification* in a self-contradictory manner.

Finally, we must beware of reasoning in a circle by using a premise as ultimate proof for itself as a conclusion. We support proposition (A) with proposition (B) then support proposition (B) with (C) and finally support (C) with the original proposition (A)—e.g. *Are you the king? Yes, I am the king. How is it that you are the king? Because I'm wearing the king's hat. How is it that you are wearing the king's hat? Because I'm the king, dummy.* The Bible gives us several objective criteria upon which to support its claim of Divine inspiration, such as prophecy, the miracles of Christ and His resurrection; apostolic miracles, absence of self-contradiction, etc. The world is understandably skeptical when one proclaims that, *The Bible is the Word of God because it says so and we know it is true when it says so because it is the Word of God and that settles it.* If that settles it then there was never a need for prophecies, miracles and internal coherence.

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<sup>21</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According To Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), p. 31... "They set up a concept of faith that eliminates submission, yieldedness, or turning from sin, and they categorize all the practical elements of salvation as human works. They stumble over the twin truths that salvation is a gift, yet it costs everything." P. 140... "Eternal life is indeed a free gift (Romans 6:23). Salvation cannot be earned with good deeds or purchased with money. It has already been bought by Christ, who paid the ransom with His blood. But that does not mean there is no cost in terms of salvation's impact on the sinner's life. This paradox may be difficult but it is nevertheless true: salvation is both free and costly... Thus in a sense we pay the ultimate price for salvation when our sinful self is nailed to the cross...It is an exchange of all that we are for all that Christ is. And it denotes implicit obedience, full surrender to the lordship of Christ. Nothing less can qualify as saving faith."

Because we find ourselves in a world of spiritual and theological confusion, we must consult the Bible alone for our knowledge of the Holy Spirit rather than claiming to have consulted the Holy Spirit directly. There are hundreds of truth claims about the ministry of the Holy Spirit that fly in the very face of the scriptural authority. But before discussing what the ministry of the Spirit is not, we should review what are His functions in the world and the life of the believer. The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3, 4); came into the world to glorify Christ (Jn. 16:14); does not speak for Himself (Jn. 16:13; Acts 13:2); imparts eternal life by regeneration (Jn. 3:3-7; Titus 3:5); baptizes the believer into the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13); indwells the believer (Rom. 8:9); seals the believer to eternal life (Eph. 1:13; 4:30); fills the believer who walks in Him (Eph. 5:18); bestows gifts to believers, not in relation to our spirituality or theological accuracy, but according to the grace that is in us (Rom. 12:6); convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn. 16:7-11); intercedes for the believer (Rom. 8:26, 27); works in the believer's sanctification (Heb. 10:14, 15); is the earnest of the believer's inheritance (Eph. 1:13, 14); is the Comforter (Jn. 13:1, 17, 26); and enables believer's to be receptive to spiritual things (I Cor. 2:14). In the past He was at work in creation (Gen. 1:1), was the source of the divine inspiration of the Bible writers (II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:20, 21), and generated the virgin birth of Christ (Lk. 1:35).

We often hear the accusation that one is blasphemously limiting the Holy Spirit unless he agrees that all He has done in the past He must still be doing today. This accusation is usually leveled against those who believe that continuing revelation, divine inspiration, and personal inerrancy ceased with the original apostolic office. It is said that such an one is altogether denying the immutability of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

On the contrary, the providential activity of the entire Trinity is present in every moment of our lives and on all occasions. However, we would be limiting the Holy Spirit if we insisted that He must be generating virgin births, raising the dead, or inspiring new doctrines today whether or not He desires to do so. Therefore, let us distinguish the Bible doctrine of the Holy Spirit from dogmas which have developed from traditional misconceptions. These misconceptions are often used to proclaim sacramentalism as the authorized Gospel of Christ. Remember, when seeking to determine what the truth is, an important step is to determine what it is not.

The *witness of the Spirit* and the *leading of the Spirit* are subjects which are usually discussed side-by-side. However, we will deal with them separately throughout the remainder of this chapter.

*"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God"* (Rom. 8:16). Some will claim the Spirit to have witnessed to their hearts that they were indeed reborn in baptism and therefore conclude that *baptismal regeneration* is the revealed will of God. It would be incorrect to counter that argument by insisting that such a claim denies the inerrancy or inspiration of the Bible. This type of affirmation is, however, grounded on the belief in continuing extra-biblical revelation from God. It is the affirmation that God is conceptually communicating His inerrant will in addition to the content of Scripture. Those claiming continuing revelation may make themselves less conspicuous by calling their new information a *Holy Spirit conviction* or a *burden* divinely placed on their hearts. By this semantic they can avoid an embarrassing association with some charismatics who do not mince words about their claim to be

prophets receiving direct revelation from God. But it must be remembered that most of the Scriptures were not delivered through the audible voice of God, but rather through *inerrant Holy Spirit convictions* or the *burden of the Lord*. This is why the personal vocabulary, literary style, and personality of each author can be observed. Yet, these *convictions* and *burdens* were in every sense revelations from God. Divine inspiration occurred when the Holy Spirit enabled the recipient to communicate this revelation to others in conceptual or propositional form either orally or in writing. The question to be addressed is one of whether or not individuals are receiving conceptual or propositional information from God today in addition to the content of the Bible. Or, is the Bible the only source of information for Christian doctrine since the death of the Apostles?

When one speaks of having discovered the will of God, he should be careful to define his terms correctly. Though the full will of God is beyond our finite minds, we do know of two categories within God's will as it pertains to our lives. First, there is the revealed will of God, which is the Bible properly interpreted. The second is the unrevealed will of God, which is His sovereign desire for every other area of personal life. God has not simply abandoned us to the Bible alone. He has assured us that He is at work in every area of our lives. However, as long as a man possesses an Adamic nature, he cannot reach a level of personal inerrancy in discerning God's undeclared will. The fact that we are not stopped from fulfilling many of our own intentions does not constitute proof that we are fulfilling the perfect will of God in all that we do or proclaim. God may sovereignly permit us to fulfill a personal plan or express a false belief when another plan or proclamation would have been better from the beginning—e.g. *how often would I* [God's loving will] *have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not* [God's permissive will] (Matt. 23:37, emphasis added). Though many faceted, all of God's will is sovereign. Some of the most outstanding Christians in history could have looked over their shoulders and identified how everything they accomplished could have been executed more accurately, efficiently and to the glory of God.

We can observe many Christians who are deeply distressed when they hear the testimonies of others describing how wonderful it is to be standing in the *perfect center of God's will* regarding every single aspect of their lives, including their extra-biblical beliefs. The distressed believers may come to doubt their very salvation or that God hears their prayers because, after all their attempts to confess sin and to obey God, they never experience *the perfect center of God's will* or hear *His voice*. They conclude that there is something desperately lacking in their lives about which they can do nothing. If they would study the Scriptures on this matter they would find that getting closer to and more intimate with God is accomplished through obedience to His *declared will*, (i.e. the Bible).

The Scriptures teach that, in the sight of God, right and wrong are absolute. Therefore, if one claims to be *convicted* or *burdened* that *believer's baptism* and *rebaptism* are heresy, he must affirm that this is heresy for all believers as well. One who makes such extra-biblical claims is relating in propositional form what he considers to be inerrant concepts from the Lord. He seems certain that he has spoken the *will of God* but may deny having received a verbal revelation. But there is no way a non-verbal burden can be verbally explained. One cannot non-verbally comprehend God's will

without reducing it to verbal concepts. A non-verbal conviction or a non-verbal burden, informing one of God's inerrant extra-biblical will, cannot exist.

Occasionally, that which cannot be demonstrated from the Bible to be heresy or sinful is labeled *worldly*, and thus made heretical or sinful by the *inspired* will of the affirmer. Without citing a verse of Scripture, entire catalogues of acts and concepts have been labeled *sin* and *heresy* as if they were symbols of rebellion against the obvious *leading* and *convicting* of the Holy Spirit. It is all that a good Christian can do to hate what the Bible calls sin and heresy, yet these affirmers feel compelled of the Holy Spirit to invent new classifications of sin and heresy and to place upon Christians a burden which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear. The initial error was in failing to limit the word *worldly* to the biblical definitions of sin and heresy.

One is on dangerous ground when he proclaims the dictates of his own spirit as a message from God and then preaches the vision of his own imagination as a God-sent message—

Thus saith the Lord God; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!...Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not spoken (Ezek. 13:3, 7)?

When the imagination and conscience are construed to be the voice of God in extra-biblical matters, they must be cast down—

[For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;] Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:4, 5).

It is critical that we learn to distinguish the revealed will of God from what we consider to be our own best judgment. How does one check his personal wisdom when it is in fact a subjective experience? The answer is in consulting the objective, sole authority of Scripture for faith, doctrine and practice. The canon of Scripture is closed and there is no continuing revelation. When confronted with several self-proclaimed prophets, one will ask, *How do I know which one to believe?* The answer is simple, *Don't believe any of them.* This standard will eliminate perhaps most of the confusion in contemporary Christianity.

If *Holy Spirit convictions* and *burdens* were inerrant revelations in Bible times, then we must assume that they would still be the same today. The *still small voice* inside of us is ourselves talking to ourselves and not the voice of God, unless an actual Bible concept is being subjectively brought to mind. Or, if it is not us talking nor the Bible internalized, we may have a more serious problem yet.

Rom. 8:16 is not saying that the Holy Spirit is witnessing to our spirit, but rather with our spirit. Thus, there are two witnesses in this verse: that of the Holy Spirit and that of our spirit. It is when the two witnesses agree that assurance of salvation can be rightfully claimed. When the witness of the believer's spirit, as to why he believes he is a child of God, agrees with the witness of the Holy Spirit (i.e. the apostolic gospel), then he knows that he is a child of God. Many advocates of the sacramental gospel claim the inner witness of the Spirit as the grounds of their assurance.

We have witnessed Reformers affirming that doctrinal concepts which do not contradict the Bible may be taught as God's will. If this affirmation is correct, the canon of Scripture should never have been closed and believers should have expected continuing revelation throughout the entire church age. If revelation and inspiration did not cease with the apostolic office, then we have no reason to believe that those who compiled the New Testament canon, and closed it, knew what they were doing or had any authority from God to do it.

Those claiming to possess an extra-biblical message from the Spirit will often try to make two separate categories out of one in order to open the door and step outside the bounds of Scripture. For example, in John 3:5, 6 Christ told Nicodemus that he must be *born of the Spirit* in order to see the Kingdom of God. This is the second birth. However, in I Pet. 1:23 the Apostle Peter speaks of being born again of the incorruptible seed by the Word of God. This is not a third birth but is synonymous with the second birth. In like manner, the content of the Spirit's witness in the heart and the content of the Bible's witness to the heart are one—i.e. *The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life* (John 6:63). Similarly, the quickening of the Holy Spirit and the quickening of the Word of God are one. In John 6:63 *It is the spirit that quickeneth...* (c.f. Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 2:13; I Cor. 15:45). On the other hand, it is the Word of God that is *quick* (Hebrews 4:12). David said: *Quicken thou me according to thy word* (Ps. 119:25); *...For thy word hath quickened me* (vs.50); *I will never forget thy precepts for with them thou hast quickened me* (vs. 93); *Quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word* (vs. 107); and *...Quicken me according to thy word* (vs. 154). The same is true regarding the verbal communication of the leading of the Spirit. In Ps. 37:23 David said: *The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord*. Yet in Ps. 119:133 he said: *Order my steps in thy word*. So, in a post-apostolic context, the verbally communicated leading of the Spirit and the verbal communication of the Scriptures are one in content. This is not to say that God does not providentially direct in our lives at all times, but He is not speaking to us about this beyond the content of the Bible.

In I Jn. 2:20 we see that the unction of the Holy Spirit is a source of information—*But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things*. This passage is often cited as a biblical basis for extra-biblical knowledge. But where did the recipients of this epistle obtain this body of knowledge called *all things*? Does the phrase *all things* have parameters or does it mean *omniscience*? The answer lies in verse 24: *If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father*. Here we observe that the outer witness (i.e. that which they had heard from the apostles from the beginning, Heb. 2:3, 4), and the inward abiding of that same body of truth are one in content. Thus, the anointing or unction of the Holy Spirit and the inward abiding of (and agreement with) the apostolic teachings are one in content—

But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, **and is truth** and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him [emphasis added] (I Jn. 2:27).

So, the *unction* is the *anointing*; the *anointing* is *the truth*; and the *truth* is *that which was heard from the beginning* (i.e. the apostolic message)—

*...And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth (I Jn. 5:6); For the truth's sake which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us forever (II Jn. 2).*

Again, note the content of that which was heard from the beginning:

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things **write** we unto you, that your joy may be full [emphasis added] (I Jn. 1:3, 4).

The word “we” in this instance refers to the apostolic office. One should not use this passage to affirm that fullness of joy is insufficiently obtained through commitment to the anointed truths of the apostolic writings.

Likewise, it is observed that all Scripture was given—that *the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works* (II Tim. 3:17). Every furnishing we need to carry out the work of God in our lives is contained in the information of Scripture. This written information will make us *perfect* (or complete) and thus there are not essential informational furnishings to be discovered elsewhere.

Again, we notice that I Jn. 5:9-11, 13 declares that the inner witness of God and the recorded witness of God are one:

*If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the **witness in himself** [inner witness]: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the **record** [outer witness] that God gave of his Son. And this is the record [outer witness], that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.... These things have I **written** [outer witness] unto you that believe on the name of the son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life... [emphasis added].*

Notice John's equation of this written knowledge and assurance with the inner witness of the Spirit: *...And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us* (I Jn. 3:24b). The content of a last will and testament document and the will of the signator should be one and the same. The last will and testament that God has left on earth is the Scriptures. God's sovereign will is infinitely more vast than His revealed will. However, God's revealed will for the believer and the revealed will of His written Word are one in content. He may subjectively bestow duplicate information within (i.e. conscience and natural law, Romans 1), but not additional doctrine. Additional dogma should be considered the product of one's own judgment or, more seriously, from a demonic source. Although personal judgment can be very fruitful when walking in the spiritual truths of God's Word, it is not a valid basis for a theological truth claim. One's judgment in extra-biblical matters should not be called *the absolute revealed will of God*. The inner witness does not contain more information than the outer witness.

The scribes and Pharisees asked Christ: *Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread* (Mtt. 15:2). Hand-washing is a fruitful act of personal judgment and a healthy practice, but the sin was in elevating the concept into an article of faith (i.e. the revealed will of God in doctrinal form). Christ answered them, saying: *why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your traditions* (vs.3). Obviously, such an elevation of their personal preferences was a direct violation of God's will, not a revelation of it. In the case of the scribes and Pharisees, such a practice negated all of their attempts to worship God—*But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men* (vs. 9). Also, though the scribes and Pharisees believed in the infallibility of the OT, this practice became the academic equivalent of negating the Bible altogether—*Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition* (vs. 6). Good personal preferences are advisable but should never be elevated to the level of *God's revealed will*.

Spiritual illumination is often defined as a guiding light from within which enables one to see beyond the words of Scripture into a more divine message or to know the precise geographical location on earth where God's perfect will can be performed. The same principle is applied in both cases. The Bible does not speak of normal Christians knowing God's inerrant geographical will or merchandising will. The Apostle James addressed the issue of knowing God's mind in such applications:

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. (James 4:13-16).

No one knows if it is the Lord's will that he will live for another twenty-four hours. How then can he know where God wants him to be geographically located for the next year? Perhaps some Christians were boasting of absolute knowledge in these areas. James said: *But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil*.

All of life's circumstances are within the providential and permissive will of God. Circumstances surround the believer at all times. However, circumstantial advantages should not be set forth as evidence for a truth claim in extra-biblical matters. The question should be: upon what information is his path being illuminated? David said: *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path* (Ps. 119:105). *Damascus Road* experiences and *Macedonian calls* should not be expected by Christians of today. The Holy Spirit should not be expected to speak to local churches today saying, *Separate me Barnabas, [the prophet] and Saul [the Apostle]*. We often hear the challenging question: *if God verbally reveals His geographical and temporal will to believers, then why should we not conclude that He convicts us about extra-biblical doctrines which He wants delivered to the Church?*

A semantic maneuver used often in this regard is to refer to one's new dogma as a biblical principle, though not an explicit biblical precept. This will give the appearance of biblical authority to an extra-biblical idea. This is how *baptismal regeneration* has been extracted from almost every reference to water or moisture in the Bible. This is

how some churches establish standards of *tradition vs. fad* rather than the biblical issue of *modesty vs. immodesty*. The error is in distinguishing *biblical principle* from *biblical precept* in Bible interpretation. There are no principles in the Bible which are not at the same time verbal, propositional precepts.

Whenever we hear someone speaking of implied principles between the lines of Scripture, we must remind them that the only thing between the lines of the Bible is white paper. Everything the Spirit intended to say is in the words of the lines—not between, not in the numerical value of the words, and not in secret computer codes. When we say that we believe in the *verbal* [words], *plenary* [full] inspiration of the Bible, we are affirming that the full message of God is in the words and not between or outside of them.

Does this approach to Bible interpretation constitute a dethroning of the Holy Spirit? Is this approach too cold, theological and academic? Does it lack the personal touch of God? Is it impractical for everyday life? The answer is *yes*, if the doctrinal truth of God's Word can be called impractical to our spiritual lives. That which is academically true in the Bible is never cold to a spiritual Christian, as God said to Jeremiah: *Is not my Word like as a fire? Saith the Lord...* (Jer. 23:29). We must allow our biblical theology to influence every area of our lives. The modern attempt to distinguish the practical from the theological in the Christian life is a cloaked attack on the content of the Bible, though not necessarily premeditated. God said to Israel through Hosea:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing that thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children (Hosea 4:6).

The two disciples who had traveled with Jesus on the road to Emmaus said: *...Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*

Truth claims founded upon an affirmation of personal inerrancy can often be extremely intimidating. The individual making the affirmation must be trusted as the source of knowledge for God's extra-biblical will. God said to Jeremiah, *Cursed be the man that trusteth in man* (Jer. 17:5). It is not the task of the preacher to compel souls to lean on him for salvation and knowledge of God's will, but his task is to exhort souls to trust in Whom he is trusting. Each Christian should learn to distinguish between the preacher who is trusting in the truth of the Bible alone and the preacher who is certain of the inerrancy of his own personal judgments or preferences in extra-biblical matters. The idea of *continuing revelation* has been one of the most devastating challenges to the gospel of Christ throughout church history.

The claim of continuing revelation is often reinforced by the affirmation that we can definitely know God's perfect leading in our lives. That God is providentially directing us is obvious from the Scriptures. That we are precisely following that direction cannot be determined by a mortal apart from a propositional, inspired revelation. But does not Romans 8:14 say: *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the Sons of God?* A popular interpretation of this verse is that assurance of sonship will be confirmed by the steady reception of extra-biblical, supernatural direction from the Holy Spirit about life's personal direction and doctrinal convictions. However,

a closer study of the context will make it obvious that the subject is one of holiness of life through obedience to the righteous mandates of Scripture—

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit...(vs.5); and (vss. 12, 13)—Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

A Christian shows by such living that he has been led of God to do so.

Many contemporary saints are living in a state of constant anxiety and fear that they are not performing perfectly God's undeclared will for their lives in areas which are not covered in Scripture. The anxiety proliferates when they are assured by others that personal inerrancy in such matters should be normal if one is truly spiritual. They are told that the only alternative is to live their lives carnally outside of the *perfect will of God*.

The Bible teaches personal responsibility for our own judgment. One may avoid such responsibility by affirming every personal decision to be one which God made for him and delivered directly to him. All who question his judgment will be made to appear to be challenging God Himself Who made the decision in the first place. If the idea leads to failure, one will simply redefine the catastrophe as a mysterious plan of God to teach him patience or to judge those who followed him into the failure. Complaining that the course of action or the truth claim was not well thought out will be made to appear as an attack upon the integrity of God's sovereign wisdom. But when the Bible is properly taught, there should be a Holy Spirit revival of critical thinking and personal responsibility in our service to God.

Another verse which is often used to support supernatural, extra-biblical guidance by inner feelings is Isa. 30:20, 21 which reads:

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

This is the same advice that was given to Joshua, but in his case it was a reference to the Scriptures which Moses had received—

Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest (Joshua 1:7).

However, in the Isaiah passage, the *word behind* will be the wise counselors who will be visibly present. The visible teachers will faithfully warn them when they sin against the Word of God and cause them to repent, thus delivering them from God's judgments (vss. 22-26). There is nothing here about an inward voice of any kind.

To know the perfect extra-biblical will of God regarding life and belief, one would have to possess personal inerrancy, and such a gift is not promised to post-apostolic believers. It is popular to cite instances of extraordinary guidance in the Bible, claim the same for oneself, and plead the unchangeableness and omnipotence of God in

order to command the belief of others. In this case such a person would accuse doubters of limiting God—an act often referred to as blasphemy. He will remind us that Philip was infallibly directed to join himself to the Ethiopian eunuch's chariot (Acts 8:26). It was directly revealed to Peter that he must accept the invitation of Cornelius in Acts 10:1-23. In Acts 13 the Holy Spirit said to separate Barnabas and Saul for a special work. This was in fulfillment of a vision received in a trance by Paul earlier as recorded in Acts 22:17-21. Paul crossed into Europe after a vision in Acts 16:6-10. We must not fail to notice that each of these instances were the experiences of apostles and prophets and that they were all direct inerrant revelations from God. Such personal inerrancy had been promised to the apostles who were to hand down the doctrines of the NT. John 14:26 is a promise of personal inerrancy and total supernatural recall to those who were with Christ (i.e. the apostles)—

But the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

There is no mention that this is a promise to contemporary believers—otherwise, we can write Scripture with inerrant inspiration and total recall as well as did the apostles.

Many will object to the above point by affirming that all of the believers of Rome were instructed to prove what is the *perfect will of God*—

And be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2).

A quick study of the context will reveal that the thing which the believer is to prove is that the Word of God is right and that obedience to it works. Chapters 12, 13, and 14 describe what is being referred to as the *perfect will of God*. It is a clear reference to that which was taught by the apostles and prophets [now contained in the Bible] and not an injunction to experience personal inerrancy.

Those claiming divine extra-biblical knowledge about any matter may often refer to Col. 1:9 which reads:

For this cause we also, since the days we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

But we should be careful to note that the knowledge was to be in *wisdom and spiritual understanding*. Wisdom and understanding are not sources of information, but rather proper reactions to God's truth. The phrase *His will* is qualified in vss. 10-13:

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear son.

Each item in this passage is a commonly occurring biblical precept. Therefore, *His will* in this context is a reference to God's declared will. It would not be prudent to use Col. 1:9 to affirm extra-biblical knowledge about the nature of baptism, nor of personal

decisions regarding the purchase of an automobile or a home. Paul was not asking for them to have the knowledge of God's full will, but for them to be full *with the knowledge of His will*.

We are often challenged at this point with the affirmation that though we have no extra-biblical knowledge of doctrinal truth, we may know the mind of God in personal decisions of our lives. Such a view would not be a challenge to the authority of the Bible and Christians should not divide at that point. However, we commonly see the doctrinal and personal aspects of the affirmation in partnership. In fact, the personal dimension is often used as reinforcement for the claim of an extra-biblical doctrinal conviction.

Though discussed previously, we should look again at I Cor. 2:14, which states:

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Is this verse saying that natural men do not *understand*, or that they do not *receive*? We know of many unregenerate people who understand spiritual things in the Bible and then reject them. Many understand the Gospel but postpone a decision for Christ. Many understand six-day creationism, the virgin birth, deity of Christ, inerrancy of Scripture, and yet have not received eternal salvation from the Lord. Does this not contradict the phrase, *neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned*? The Greek for *know* is *ginosko* and can have reference to personally experiencing a truth. It is the same idea that Christ used in Matt. 7:23 with the words: *And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you*. There is nothing regarding them that Christ does not intellectually comprehend. He simply meant that He had not received them into a personal relationship with Himself. The virgin Mary used this concept when she was told that she would give birth to the Son of God, saying: *How shall this be, seeing I know not a man*? She knew men. She knew her espoused, Joseph; her father; and her uncle Zechariah. She meant that she had never *received* a man into such a personal relationship as would result in pregnancy. The *things of the Spirit of God* in this passage refer to the *testimony of God* which is now declared in the Scriptures through the mouths of the Apostles. This is particularly true of the words of Paul as we look back to I Cor. 2:1 where we read: *And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God*. Vs. 14 does not teach that a saint possesses E.S.P. with God regarding His extra-biblical, undeclared will in doctrinal or personal matters.

The phrase, *they are spiritually discerned* is not a reference to inerrant, extra-biblical information originating from within the believer, but rather speaks of the believer's reaction to the *testimony of God*. An alcoholic knows that his strong drink will destroy his liver but, because of lack of discernment, he will disregard what he knows and choose to remain a drunkard. In the same sense, spiritual discernment is not a revelational source of doctrinal or personal knowledge, but rather a correct reaction to God's revealed will in His Word.

Closely related to the term *discern* is the concept of *judging*. I Cor. 2:15 affirms: *He that is spiritual judgeth all things*. This means that spiritual discernment seeks to react to all things in accordance with Scripture—*But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil* (Heb. 5:14). Is this a contradiction to Matt. 7:1 where Jesus said:

*Judge not that ye be not judged?* Matt. 7 is exhorting us to judge nothing using ourselves as the standard of measurement. I Cor. 2 is exhorting the spiritual to judge all things solely by the measurement of God's testimony—i.e. His Word. This is spiritual discernment. It is interesting to note how many times in Matt. 7 Christ exhorts His followers to exercise sound judgment regarding dogs and swine (vs.6), entering at the strait gate (vss. 13), false prophets in sheep's clothing (vs. 15), fruit-bearing (vss. 16-20), being known by the Lord (vss. 21- 23), building one's spiritual house upon a rock rather than sand (vss. 24-27), and doctrine (vss. 28, 29).

Instead of God anointing the thoughts and intents of one's heart with the inerrant ability to determine the mind of God in extra-biblical matters, it is the Word of God that discerns *the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Heb. 4:12).

The book of Proverbs speaks of two levels of understanding. First, there is a level of understanding based upon personal feelings apart from the Word of God. Prov. 3:5 says: *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding.* Secondly, there is an understanding based upon the Word of God—*O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be of an understanding heart* (Prov. 8:5). A popular interpretation of Prov. 3:5 is that the believer should trust in his heart and not in his understanding. But the verse does not say, *trust in thy heart*, but rather, *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart*. In fact, Prov. 28:26 states: *He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.* One should not affirm that the counsel of his own heart, in extra-biblical matters, is the mind and thoughts of God. Prov. 19:21 states: *There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.* We should never refer to our extra-biblical thoughts as the mind of God and our way as the revealed way of God. Isa. 55:8, 9 affirms: *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.* The Bible does not promise that we can know when we are standing in the perfect center of God's undeclared, extra-biblical will for our lives, or that we can even know where that spot is located. The Bible does, however, tell us to concern ourselves with obeying and understanding His declared will in the Scriptures. It is fashionable to condemn honest biblical scholarship and exalt the mystical pursuit of personal infallibility in determining the mind of the Spirit about extra-biblical concepts which seriously affect other people's lives.

Sometimes, a missionary will claim that he/she knows that God has geographically given a call to a specific mission field through a devotional study of Ps. 2:8 which promises: *Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.* In its context this verse is solely a reference to Christ during the millennium. But the missionary believes that there is a non-literal, yet spiritual, interpretation of this passage that personally applies to his life's geographical direction in a way that is not meant for other members of the Body of Christ at that moment. Though the passage called him/her to China, it does not call all Christians to that same field. The Bible nowhere justifies such use of the Scriptures. The only proof of this interpretation is the personal testimony of the person who practiced this method. Using this same hermeneutic, a missionary might cancel his plans to do a work for God in Egypt by flipping to verses in the OT which say, *go not into Egypt.*

Constituents of varied world religions gain a false confidence that God has bestowed an inward feeling which confirms their chosen beliefs about certain dogmas.

They may call this a *burning in the bosom* or the *peace of the Spirit* about a matter. Although the Lord desires that the peace of God to rule in the hearts of believers (Col. 3:15), He does not promise that feelings of peace will determine His extra-biblical will, and often asks believers to act in their absence. Daniel prophesied that the anti-Christ would *by peace destroy many* (Dan. 8:25). Feelings of peaceful euphoria can be very misleading, especially in the case of mystical cults. Unbelievers can experience such sensations in relation to physical or mental health. Such euphoria can also stem from the conscience; from the Adamic nature, and from the new nature. Christians should not exempt themselves from personal responsibility for their individual judgment in extra-biblical matters by saying that God has given them divine peace about the subject.. Christians should find their joy and peace in believing the Word of God. The three Hebrew children, in the book of Daniel, had no clue as to whether or not they would burn in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:17). They only knew that they were not going to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image in either case (vs.18). The same is true of Daniel in the den of lions (Dan. 6).

Although feelings are not conclusive, they are not to be totally ignored. If we feel extremely uneasy about a course of action or a belief, we should stop and think it through again, seeking to refine our thinking on the matter.

It has been argued that personal plans for the future would be impossible without direct information from God. Even the apostles held themselves responsible to plan for the future. They would propose to do something and set out to do it fearlessly, recognizing at the same time that God might order things in a totally different way (cf. I Cor. 16:8, 9; II Cor. 1:15-24; Acts 15:36). In Acts 16:7 we read: *After they were come to Mysia, they essayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.* The apostles had no way of knowing in advance that their good and noble plans were not the perfect will of God. In II Cor. 1:15-17 we read:

And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit; And to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea. When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay?

Paul had been charged with changeableness, but he argued that he had sound reasons for changing his plans. New facts had come to light and the situation had been drastically and unforeseeably altered. He never claimed that his original plans were anointed or that he *felt unmistakably led of the Spirit* in that direction. The Bible does not teach that the desire of one's heart is a revelation from God regarding what to believe or do. An excellent example in this light is II Chron. 6:8, 9, which reads:

But the Lord said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house for my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart: Notwithstanding thou shalt not build the house; but thy son which shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house for my name.

Sometimes the noble desire of one's heart and God's plans are not the same.

There are also those who feel that God, in answer to prayer, has given them a sign that their position on baptism, or some other subject, is the will of God. A favorite Bible

story in this wise is that of Gideon's fleece (Judges 6). The story of this fleece and other guiding signs in the Bible have caused many to conclude that they have a right to ask God for a sign before they make an important decision. Gideon's fleece was put out twice after God had affirmed verbally that Israel would be delivered by His hand. The putting out of the fleece was actually a demonstration of lack of faith in God's Word and ability to perform. We must also remember that the purpose of the fleece was not to confirm Gideon's personal plans and thoughts, but to confirm a direct revelation that had been given him. Such personal revelations are not being received since the Bible has become complete. Truly spiritual Christians do not need signs to boost their faith in the recorded promises of God. If the cases of extraordinary guidance mentioned in Scripture (Peter and Cornelius, Philip and the Eunuch, Paul and the Macedonians) were intended to be a model for post-apostolic saints to follow, and not just uniquely for apostles and prophets, we should look for a statement of that fact in the NT. Yet, we have cited many passages that instruct Christians to pass on that which was received from the apostles (Rom. 16:17; II Thess. 3:6; II Tim. 2:2; Titus 1:9; Jude 3).

Many gifted and qualified Christians have hesitated to enter full time ministry because they have neither received a *call* to the ministry nor an inward *anointing* with a set of doctrinal convictions. In the NT God personally called apostles and prophets, but nowhere mentions an individual call to the pastorate, to the mission field, nor for any other type of full time Christian ministry. Timothy was to commit the ministry of the Gospel to faithful men. In I Tim. 3, Paul told Timothy that, if a man desired the office of bishop and met the list of qualifications, he desired a good thing. Every qualification in the list was simply something God wants to see exemplified in the life of every Christian. If the desire and qualifications exist, one should not wait for a personal, verbal divine call. If he desires full time service on God's terms, God will accept him. We cannot help but wonder how many missionary endeavors are being ignored in the face of the clearest opportunities simply because there is no sign nor personal revelation to assure that one should proceed. On the other hand, how often does some supposed sign justify a foolish or even unscriptural course of action? The second and third missionary journeys were undertaken because the churches needed the help. The need determined the course of action in such cases. Gary Friesen expressed it well when he said:

I had become convinced that Scripture does not require some kind of mystical experience whereby one "hears" God's "inward" call...Rather than waiting for some kind of inward voice, a man should cultivate an inward response to the challenge to serve God in the fullest manner possible....According to the New Testament, a church leader must be a spiritually mature Christian man who desires a position of leadership in the church, and is able to lead God's people and teach God's Word....Where the traditional view speaks of a "call," the New Testament speaks of a "desire" or an "aspiration" for the pastoral office. Perhaps the question (about the call at the time of ordination) should be reworded: "Why do you desire to be set apart for the gospel ministry?" ...(The answer should be) I want to serve the Lord in the best and fullest way possible. God says that the office of pastor provides a good means for serving Him. So I have consciously

aspired to become qualified for that position. The characteristics listed in I Timothy 3, Titus 1, and I Pet 5 have been my personal goals.<sup>22</sup>

Occasionally a Christian will seek advice regarding how to be certain of God's call to the ministry. Such an one is often told to do anything to keep from it, for, if he is called, he will not be able to keep from it. This advice is dangerously false. As long as one is in possession of the fleshly nature, he has the power to keep from serving God in any way he wishes. There is no passage of Scripture that advises any Christian to avoid serving God in the ministry if desire and qualifications are there.

Christians are not encouraged in the NT to seek after signs. Satan uses signs and creates coincidences, especially with people whom he considers to be emotional cripples. Quite often, the testimony of one's *call* to the ministry is bound together with a *message* which God gave at the time.

What is even more controversial is the matter of interpreting signs. In multiple locations where Paul visited, he was warned by visions and prophecies that imprisonment, danger, and affliction awaited him if he proceeded to Jerusalem. Godly Christians felt that it would be wise for him to cancel his engagement there. But Paul did not for a moment interpret these as a sign that he should reconsider his duty to deliver the relief money which he had raised for the poor saints in the City of David, as well as his duties in other areas. His determination overruled the almost universal petitions of his friends (cf. Acts 20:22-24; 21:10-12).

Some Christians will use circumstances to proclaim God's purposes regarding a truth claim or a choice of action. But satanic forces are also allowed to arrange circumstances to bring about remarkable coincidences (II Thess. 2:9-11). Many wrong marriages and divorces have been pursued in this manner.

Nevertheless, God may often use circumstances to make some course of action impossible. Paul often made the decision to relocate when persecution became so intense that a public ministry was no longer possible. Paul's appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11) was determined by circumstances which made it apparent that such an appeal might be his only escape from murder on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 25:10, 11, 20, 21). Paul also knew how to seize sudden and unexpected opportunities, as at Athens, where circumstances allowed for a one-time opportunity to speak on Mars Hill. Circumstances seem to have influenced godly wisdom in the NT only when they presented an opportunity for an honorable course of action or when they made a planned course of action impossible. Even then, the exact details of how God wanted the endeavor executed was not given.

David received what appeared to be remarkable *circumstantial guidance* to do the wrong thing. King Saul had been pursuing David in order to kill him (I Sam. 24). It had already been revealed to David that he was to be the next king and that God had taken the kingdom from Saul. Suddenly, Saul entered the cave alone wherein David and his men were hiding. David's men felt that God was overruling circumstances to give opportunity to fulfill His divine plan. But David did not determine God's will by circumstances on that day, and refused to kill the king. Subsequently, circumstances were again seemingly miraculously overruled, but David took Saul's spear and his jar of

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<sup>22</sup> Gary Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God* (Portland: Multnomah, 1980), pp. 315-319).

water from beside him as he slept, instead of assuming supernatural guidance to kill the king (I Sam. 26:5-12).

We have already discussed James 4:13-18 regarding revelations of God's temporal, geographical, and merchandising will. Still, some may persist in using a claim of geographical, divine direction as reinforcement for a truth claim regarding baptism or some other doctrine. In fact, we often hear that God will not use us until we find the perfect center of His geographical will. The biblical truth is that any and every place can be the place of triumph and victory when the Gospel is presented and the Bible is properly consulted.

The Apostle Paul came to Troas with the intention of preaching the Gospel. There he found an open door of service which he claimed was of the Lord—*Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's Gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord* (II Cor. 2:12). This would seem to be a clear opportunity for triumph indeed. However, he had no peace of spirit about the absence of an associate with whom he desired at his side in the work—*I had no rest in my spirit because I found not Titus my brother* (II Cor. 2:13a). Complicating matters further, he had a vision of a man in Macedonia requesting him to come over—

And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them (Acts 16:8-10).

Now he was confronted with two simultaneous open doors of opportunity which were apparently *of the Lord*. His decision was to leave the open door of the Lord at Troas and to proceed toward the direction of Macedonia—*But taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia* (II Cor. 2:13b). Did Paul walk out on God's perfect place of triumph when he left Troas? On the contrary, Paul tells us that anyplace and everyplace is the geographical location of triumph if the knowledge of Christ is being manifested: *Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place* (II Cor. 2:14). This incident seems to contradict the truth claim that God reveals His will by providentially leaving only one geographical door of service open where triumph in Christ may be experienced. We do not need post-apostolic visions of *Macedonian calls*, yet, as we read Paul's account we should realize that we may at times choose among any number of open doors of opportunity and gain the victory through scriptural obedience. A wise Christian will, however, choose the direction that appears to offer him the best use of his talents and abilities for the Lord.

Quite frequently, we may hear someone proclaiming God's perfect will for another regarding a mission field or extra-biblical truth claim conviction. Even the Apostle Paul would not violate the personal preferences of Apollos in extra-biblical matters—

As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time (I Cor. 16:12).

Why did Paul not impose his personal desire upon Apollos as a revelational mandate from God and, more importantly, why should any one of us attempt the same?

Some Christians will procrastinate through life, waiting for God to choose a vocation, career or a doctrinal position for them, but they never experience such a divine call. Some are postponing baptism because God has not personally directed them about that matter. It is not enough for them that God's Word commands all believers to be baptized. They have memorized Eph. 4:1 wherein Paul says: *I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherein ye are called.* A clear exposition of this verse with the surrounding chapters will reveal that the vocation wherein they were called is *sonship*. This vocation was to be characterized by humility, meekness, longsuffering, holiness, unity, mutual forbearance, and brotherly love (cf. Eph. 4:2). The Bible does not teach that God will inform a saint regarding whether to be a fisherman, shepherd, carpenter, centurion, seller of purple, jailor or a bishop of a local church.

Sometimes an unsuspecting Christian will be putty in the hands of one who denies receiving a direct revelation from God but nonetheless has an unmistakable *burden* or *conviction* from the Lord regarding a truth claim that must be heard. These two terms, (*burden* and *conviction*) when used in the Bible, almost always refer to a claim of having received an inspired revelation from God:

And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What *is* the burden of the LORD? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD. And *as for* the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house. Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbour, and every one to his brother, What hath the LORD answered? and, What hath the LORD spoken? And the burden of the LORD shall ye mention no more: for every man's word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God (Jer. 23:33-36).

Christians should be keenly aware of self-proclaimed prophets who place God's stamp on their own wills by using the phrases *burden of the Lord* or *Holy Spirit conviction* in reference to extra-biblical dogma. These false prophets will often seek to place their hearers into a bondage to their *divine burdens*. If their hearers do not submit, they may be caricatured as having blasphemed the Holy Spirit Himself. They may be labeled *self-willed, opposed to God's will, and just the help Satan has been seeking*.

Paul taught that a Christian could be robbed of rewards if he submits to the legalistic mandates of another as if submitting to the will of God in an act of worship. Such a Christian may be told to not touch, taste, or handle that which God has not forbidden (cf. I Tim. 4:1-4). In such a case, he is not worshiping God but rather unknowingly worshipping the will of the false prophet—

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be

dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh (Col. 2:16-23).

The Christian must also be cautioned against being deceived by the improper use of the word *application* to teach with divine authority that which the Bible does not say. This clever semantic maneuver is designed to make one appear immune to the charge of misinterpreting or reading into the Bible. He simply affirms: *I was not interpreting, but simply applying*. All sound Bible applications must be within the parameters of sound interpretation. We must not allow someone to place us into bondage to an *application* that contains a principle which is not also a clear biblical precept.

Many of the fallacies of thinking which have been discussed within this chapter are committed by honest Christians whose characters should not be impugned on such grounds. However, this chapter was written to enable normal Christians to be familiar with some of the erroneous methods used to support extra-biblical truth claims. This understanding is particularly valuable in considering the truth claim of *baptismal regeneration* among the several mystical sects of Christianity.

However, there are other sects of Christianity which are not mystical nor subjective in their approach to Scripture. They cite numerous proof-texts in which they affirm that the Bible clearly and objectively teaches *baptismal regeneration*. In chapter nine we will endeavor to discuss each of these proof-texts in determining the reliability of the affirmation that baptism imparts the saving grace of Christ to the sinner and places him within the Body of Christ.