

Trust and Obey

BASED ON A SERIES OF BIBLE MESSAGES

by

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INTRODUCTION

These four modified expository sermons point out some of the false assumptions which are the dangerous germs of new-evangelicalism. Before we might yield to an urge to ridicule its symptoms, Pastor Carlton Helgerson reminds us that we had better learn to recognize the *virus* of this infectious “ism” which lies latent in us all.

New-evangelicalism is a term used to describe the philosophy and practices that emerged after World War II in reaction to the militancy and controversy that arose as fundamentalists sought to stem the tide of Liberalism. For a fuller understanding of this pattern of thought, one should read Pastor Carlton Helgerson’s companion booklet, *THE CHALLENGE OF A NEW RELIGION*. Although after more than four decades it may seem strange to use the term *new*, this unscriptural mind and heart set is just as much a threat to our spiritual well-being.

We need to learn from the Holy Scriptures that we must not try to improvise or improve upon God’s will and purpose, nor seek to devise any scheme by which we hope to help God out of a problem.

When we realize how grave a matter it is to do so, and how painful the consequences of such attempts are, we will not only question but deplore current organizational compromises, promotional techniques, cleverly revised translations of the Bible, etc.

It is of special importance that each believer come to recognize and judge this tendency in himself, respond to the Lord in faith and obedience, and cease to be charmed by the subtle wisdom of the natural mind within.

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Chapter I

The difference between a Promise and a Command

SARAI'S INVENTION

Important Distinction

We need to know the distinction between a prophecy and a commandment. A **prophecy** states that something is going to happen. A **commandment** tells us to do something. It may include our being involved in that prophecy. We must understand this simple aspect of Biblical interpretation. Prophecy is where the Lord says something is going to come about, and we can rely on Him to accomplish it. Only God can fulfill prophecy. Then there may be commandments or details in which He allows us to be involved in the fulfillment of prophecy.

God's Prediction

Now, let us look at an example from the Book of Genesis on how foolish it is not to go according to God's plan and program. God took a man of His own choosing, and decided that that man was to be the progenitor of a race that was to become a nation and would be a testimony to Almighty God. That man was Abram. One night God took him out and told him to look up at the sky. "Look at all the stars. Can you count them? One, two, three.... Why, you can't count them!" Let's read it, Genesis 15:5–

Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

Do you think God was able to do that? The only thing He had told this man before was "walk before Me." That is to say, "behave yourself day by day in the consciousness of My presence— walk before Me. I am watching and I am with you." That was all the instruction he had, but here he got a prediction, a prophecy, and a promise! Abram would have innumerable descendants.

Danger of Impatience

But Abram had a wife by the name of Sarai and she became impatient. They were both along in years and childless. No children. The years go by, on and on. Ever stop to realize how important it is to **wait** upon the Lord? We are so impatient. We Americans are smitten with impatience. But, you know, God doesn't seem to be in a hurry, and the better you get to know God the more you'll appreciate what it means to wait on the Lord. God is not in a hurry as we are.

Wait on the **LORD**; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the **LORD**! (Psalm 27:14)

Well, Sarai became impatient. She knew the prophecy that her husband, or that her family, would ultimately have many descendants, but she became impatient. Notice what

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she did in chapter 16. Verse one tells us she was childless. Now read on:

So Sarai said to Abram, “See now, the **LORD** has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. ³Then Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. ⁴ So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.... ¹⁵ So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. (Gen. 16:2-4, 15)

Now, I want you people who have recently come to know Christ as your Savior and are just getting into the Bible– you’re reading it, eating it up, and are all excited about it– I want to encourage you to keep on reading and as you do, be conscious of the fact that the Holy Spirit is seeking to bring to your mind helpful lessons and illustrations on how God works and also to see the frailty and shortcomings of human beings.

God had given a vision of many descendants, but God had a plan which in His time and His way would fulfill the prophecy. Instead of just trusting the Lord and living a normal married life, Sarai made an invention. You know, the Book of Ecclesiastes (7:29) talks about people seeking many schemes, trying to improve upon God’s work. Oh, it’s in us! I have to fight it all the time and I am encouraging you to fight it. We want to be innovative. We want to be inventive. We feel **we** have to do things. But we need to be reminded, “that **He** who has begun a good work in you **will complete it** until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6); “for it is **God who works in you** both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13); and “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for **without Me you can do nothing**” (John 15:5). We need to pray for each other that **God** will “make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:21).

Now, this is what happens when people make their own assumptions, being ignorant of who God is and what He is able to do and being only partially aware of God’s program. For instance, if a person only knows that they shall come from every kindred, tribe, and tongue, and nation; suppose that’s all he has? How easy it is then for him to assume that he has to bring this about without considering God’s plan as to how, forgetting that he should be an **instrument** rather than an inventor!

Using the World’s Method

Sarai copied the ways of the heathen, and so people today, certainly in new-evangelicalism, copy the methods of the world because they are trying to do something without realizing what **God** is doing and what He desires to do in the lives of people. Notice how impatient she became with God. How many years was it? Twelve years. It was thirteen years before she was to have a child of her own. That was a long time to wait. “Time is going on and I’m not getting any younger,” she must have thought.

Today we hear, “The need is great and we’ve got to get going.” But, “Wait on the **LORD**” and “Trust in the **LORD** with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Sarai’s impatient with God. She wants to get the project underway just as soon as possible. Sarai was certainly inventive and aggressive just like some promoters in our

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time who feel that we have to get things done. It doesn't make any difference what method we use or how we get it done. Just come on and get going! Never mind looking at details. Oh, that we might learn this lesson. Vital! Yet all the while God wanted to do something that would bring glory to His name.

The Marvel of God's Work

You know, all they were to do was to lead normal lives. A normal life! Abram had his duties and responsibilities. He had a lot of cattle, people working for him, tremendous responsibilities in administration. He was a husband. He was to be a husband to his wife, they were to live together. They were to belong to each other. They were to continue to function as a man and wife together. Then, you see, God would work a miracle. God would do a wonder. Later on when Sarai heard what was in the heart of God for her she said, "Me, at my age, am I going to have pleasure?" (Gen. 18:12)

Sincere Sacrifice No Excuse

But she comes up with this proposal following the way of the heathen. "Take my maid, the girl who works for me. Take her as your wife and if she bears a child, credit it to me as though it were mine. The maid is mine and so the maid's child is mine. We've got to get this project underway." There is no doubt that she was **impatient** and certainly there is no doubt that she was **serious**. She was intent in pushing this project at any cost. You respect somebody that is serious, if they are trying to serve and please God in what they think is going to help God out. It is awfully hard to fault anyone that bears such evidence of deep sincerity and commitment.

Not only that, but Sarai was **sacrificial**. And wasn't that sacrifice? You wives think about this: to be willing to step aside and have someone else take your place with your husband. That's self-denial, isn't it? That's humility. It's sacrifice in any sense of the word. But did that excuse departing from God's plan?

Oh listen, Christian friend, sincerity and sacrifice are not an excuse for our developing our own plan or reaching our own assumptions and ignoring what God wants to do for His glory.

Did It Work?

I want to point out something else. Did her plan work? Did it work? How about verse 15 (Gen. 16)? Was a son born? He was! Her plan worked! The maid conceived and bore Ishmael.

One of our missionaries shared with me some of the questionable practices of other missionaries on his field. They seemed to have greater success than the work that he was in. He said their argument was, "See, it works! It works!" Strange things are done in the name of Christ and Christianity.

An unsaved doctor friend who had retired to Florida reported to me how he went out to the beach during a college vacation time. He saw people connected with some supposed Christian group, and they were going out with papers, tracts, and doing what they considered "witnessing." Some of those girls giving out tracts and talking to other young people on the beach were clad in the scantiest bikinis. Their actions even brought embarrassment to a man who had been over fifty years in the practice of medicine, one certainly acquainted with anatomy. Not a believer, but he could see the evil of this. I remember

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reading in Christian periodicals reports of how many young people were reached by that sea-shore evangelism. It worked! It worked!

By What Standard Do We Judge?

Is that the criterion of judgment? Was Sarai right because Hagar conceived and bore a son? Did that make Sarai right, I ask you? Yes or no? The argument that is put upon us today regarding new-evangelicalism is basically this: if it works, it must be okay. The end justifies the means. We have a great objective. We have great goals. By any means we are going to reach them. Sarai's program worked.

The test is not, "does it work?" The test is not, "was more money brought in?" The test is not, "did more people make a decision?" **The test is**— "is it God's way?!" Listen, my friend, you'd better learn this and you'd better believe it and you'd better live it.

Serious Consequences

Was Sarai eventually to regret her action? Indeed she did. She learned to regret it. First of all, it upset the family. Another thing, she involved her husband in her scheme drawing him out of the perfect will of God. All the parties suffered. Ishmael suffered, too, and the suffering is still going on to this day. Am I right? When you read of the struggles and the assassinations and the wars and the threat of war in the Middle East, it's Ishmael in his hatred of Isaac. I'm talking of the descendants.

You can take a stone and throw it into a pond and there is just a "plop" but the ripples will go on and on to the very edges. People who should know better can ignore the plan of God, argue about it and say, "I was sincere, I was energetic, I wanted to get things done, I was sacrificial, etc.," but the awful effects will go on and on after they have ceased this life.

God's plan was marred. He wanted to give to this couple— no other woman involved— a son, Isaac, whose name means "laughter," and from him bring forth a great nation. From that nation He would bring forth a royal family, the family of David, and from that family bring forth His own Son, born of the virgin Mary. This was **God's** plan! And while God worked out His plan ultimately, the plan of Sarai was always there to be a hindrance, to be a deterrent, and even a disgrace. In your own life, my friend, don't substitute sincerity on your part for God's plan. Don't substitute sacrifice on your part for God's plan.

"I Will Build My Assembly"

In one of the prophetic messages of the Lord Jesus Christ when He was speaking to Peter (Matt. 16:15-19), He said this, "I will build My assembly." This was on the occasion when Peter confessed that, "You are the Christ [*the Anointed One, the Messiah*], the Son of the living God." Jesus said, "I [*referring to Himself*]...**will** build [*referring to the future— it wasn't going on when He was speaking*]...will build **My** [*that means belonging to Him*] ...**assembly**" [*Greek, ekklēsia, literally an assembly or gathered congregation*]. The context (verse 19) makes it clear that our Lord Jesus was referring to the kingdom of heaven and not the Church [*His Body*], which was kept secret until revealed to the Apostle Paul (Rom. 16:25-26 & Eph. 3:1-11). He added that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Who's going to do the building in regard to the Millennial Kingdom? The Lord Jesus Christ! This is God's pattern for His program throughout the Scriptures— "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" (Zech. 4:6); "not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph.

2:9); and “that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

Because men have not studied the Scriptures, acquainting themselves with the plan and program of God but have simply snatched a phrase or two out of context, they have sought to build tremendous organizations.

Take for example the Roman Catholic church. What a great big institution it is with all of its paraphernalia, power, wealth, and insistence that it is doing the will of God but overlooking the vast majority of God’s Word. What men have been doing down through the years has brought a considerable amount of confusion and has misrepresented the Lord in many, many ways as they decided to do their own building.

Mistakes are constantly being made in our individual lives because we don’t know God’s plan and program. We haven’t taken time to find out, many of us, what God’s plan and program is for this Age– for us as individuals, for us as an assembly.

Oh, how precious it is to know that the truth of God does get through where folks are willing to read the Scriptures for themselves. You and I should be very careful of what we do as individuals and collectively as an assembly, that we are doing it according to the plan, purpose, and blueprint of God, because it’s right there. He allows us some liberty with respect to decisions within that framework, within that pattern, but God forbid that we should transgress from it. When Jesus said, “I will build My assembly” in regard to Israel (Rom. 11:15-26), He means to do just that. In the meantime He is building His Church, taking out a people for His name (Acts 15:14; Eph. 2:14-22).

Chapter II

The End Does Not Justify the Means

SCHEMING FOR BLESSING

Not of Yourself

You know, there are a lot of religions in the world, but outside of Biblical Christianity, all of the religions are pretty much the same in this philosophy, that salvation is of yourself. “You do the best you can,” is what one religion after the other says. “Do the best you can within the framework of this teaching we give you.” As you contact people and talk with them, even some who have been influenced by Christianity, you’ll find the same thing in them. It’s of yourself, you have to do the best you can, and if you try real hard and do good and keep the Ten Commandments (at least occasionally) you’ll probably make it. ***But salvation is not of ourselves.*** It is of whom? It is of the Lord Himself.

If you think it is of yourself, you are as lost as anyone can be because the Bible clearly says “...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), “...there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). As man stands before a Holy God, he stands as a rebel condemned. The Ephesian believers who had received a great deal of enlightenment with respect to God’s marvelous plan which began before the foundation of the world needed to be reminded of this very thing, “...that not of yourselves” (Eph. 2:8-9).

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Trust Him Now!

Don't let the devil tell you that somehow you contributed thereto. It was all of the mercy and grace of God. So, if you are here today and you are trusting in yourself, I **know** where you are going. You're going to hell!! But, I want to invite you to put your trust in Jesus Christ. Trust Him. Not 50% or 65%, or 75%, but trust in Him **fully**. The fine has been paid in full with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Won't you, just now, bow your head, close your eyes, and say, "Thank you Lord Jesus for dying for me." All that is needed is His death on Calvary and that was accomplished a long time ago. Salvation is free!

Twins Prophesied

Now, turn to the first book in the Bible, the Book of Genesis, chapter twenty-five. Abraham had a son that was born to Sarah, and he, Isaac, took a wife named Rebekah. For some time she was childless and so she earnestly desired that she might have a child. Well, the Lord gave her a double blessing because she bore twins. But before the twins were born she could feel within her own body something rather unusual, and she sought to know just what this meant. There were no modern physicians present at the time to enlighten her, but the Lord did speak to her.

And the **LORD** said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger." (Gen. 25:23)

The Elder to Serve the Younger

Now, I want you to notice this prophecy. The last phrase sums it up. There were twins to be born. They would eventuate in two different nations, two different characteristics, and the elder of the twins would serve the younger, that is to say, the younger would have the pre-eminence. Let us read on:

So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. ²⁵And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. ²⁶Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. ²⁷ So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. ²⁸ And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. (Gen. 25:24-28)

Remember this prophecy, "...and the older shall serve the younger." Esau was born first. Some moments later (it may have been hours later), Jacob was born. This was to be a different order from the natural order that the elder, instead of having the pre-eminence, is going to have to yield. The younger of the two is going to have the pre-eminence.

Now, evidently Rebekah, who especially loved Jacob, acquainted him with this prophecy. She knew what God had prophesied that the younger was going to have a superior position. It is a marvelous thing to have the Word of God, the authority Himself, the Creator, saying that the younger is going to be above the elder; it's going to be contrary to the natural way that men think and behave.

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Jacob Schemes

Notice now that Jacob did not wait on the Lord but seized on the first opportunity to get his elder brother to sell him the birthright– to clear it with his brother, get him out of the way, just to make really sure that he was going to get it.

Esau, his brother, foolishly sold him his birthright. He was a hunter, he had been out in the field a long time. When he came back he was tired and of course he was hungry, “hungry as a bear.” It happened that Jacob was cooking up something that had a nice aroma, and you know what that does if you are hungry and you smell something really good. “Hmmm, I want some of that.”

Now, Jacob had something in mind. He had been waiting for the opportunity. “How am I going to get this fellow to relinquish his birthright? Here’s the opportunity.” His brother said, “Give me some of that.” “Aha,” thinks Jacob, “wait a minute....now’s my chance!”

“Sell me your birthright,” he says. Esau foolishly failing to recognize the value of the birthright, says, “Sure, what do I care? Right now I want to eat!”

How many people have sold away their future for something as temporal as a bowl of hot beans?! So, Jacob got the birthright. Now, he’s taken care of that. He’s got that nailed down. “You see, the elder is going to serve the younger, and I’m going to make sure there is no slip-up.”

Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. ³⁰ And Esau said to Jacob, “Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.” Therefore his name was called Edom. ³¹ But Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright as of this day.” ³² And Esau said, “Look, I am about to die; so what profit shall this birthright be to me?” ³³ Then Jacob said, “Swear to me as of this day.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. (Gen. 25:29-34)

Jacob schemes, “Wait a minute, what else can I do? I got the contract. He got a plate of beans. I’ve got to make sure. ‘The younger is going to impose upon the elder. The elder is going to serve the younger.’ Now I’m going to make sure that it surely does happen. Now what am I going to do?”

Rebekah Schemes

While he’s pondering on that, his mother hears something. Turn in your Bible and read the story:

Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, that he called Esau his older son and said to him, “My son.”

And he answered him, “Here I am.”

² And he said, “Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death. ³ Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. ⁴ And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.”

⁵ Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game and to bring it. ⁶ So Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, “Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother,

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saying, ⁷ 'Bring me game and make savory food for me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death.' ⁸ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you. ⁹ Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them for your father, such as he loves. ¹⁰ Then you shall take it to your father, that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death."

¹¹ And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Look, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man. ¹² Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing."

¹³ But his mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me." ¹⁴ And he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and his mother made savory food, such as his father loved. ¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the choice clothes of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. ¹⁶ And she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷ Then she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

¹⁸ So he went to his father and said, "My father;" and he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?"

¹⁹ And Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn; I have done just as you told me; please arise, sit and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me." (Gen. 27:1-19)

Did you notice the recurrence of the expression "the blessing?" You have to see the distinction between the "blessing" and the "birthright." The birthright his older brother had already given up, now he wanted to nail this down for sure and also get the special paternal blessing that was given to Abraham and was passed down from father to son.

But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because the LORD your God brought it to me." (Gen. 27:20)

Notice he refers to the Almighty as **his father's** God, not his own.

Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not."

²² So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." ²³ And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. (Gen. 27:21-23)

Helping God Out

Now Rebekah's plan was to deceive Isaac, of course. The man was nearly blind. Jacob was to enter wearing his brother's garment, disguised as his brother, and carrying with him some savory meat, this goat meat that had been so seasoned that it tasted like venison and would be just what his father would delight in. He was to say, "I am Esau."

Here's another lesson, don't you see, in the evil of not really knowing who God is and of being unclear of God's purpose and how God is going to accomplish it. Do you see that?

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The prophecy was there, “the elder shall serve the younger,” but what was God’s purpose in doing it, and how was God going to carry it out? But here these people take matters into their own hands to make sure they get what they want. It’s all so very, very simple.

Important Questions

Was it God’s intention to ultimately elevate the younger into a position of prominence, and his descendants? Was that God’s Word? Yes. It was stated in prophetic terms, was it not? But it would be whose doing? It would be **God’s doing!**

One of the fundamental lessons of Bible interpretation is to make a distinction between a **prophecy** and a **command**. To make a distinction between a **prediction** and an **order**. Now, when God said to Jacob’s grandfather, “you are going to have many descendants from your own loins,” Abraham simply believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6). He didn’t make plans to make any changes whatsoever. God was going to do it and he had confidence that God was going to do it.

Another question: was the birthright that Jacob extorted from his brother a most valuable thing? The **right** of the **first-born**? Indeed, it **was** a most valuable thing! It was the favored position of God’s covenant benefits. As we learn from the Scriptures it was the way God operated in those days as well as being a custom of the people, from father to son to grandchild, according to the leading of the Lord. The birthright, the rights and privileges of the first-born, was certainly a most treasured thing.

Another question related to it: was there real **value** in the blessing? Yes, indeed there was, because we know it involved the Messianic line. Ultimately from that line Jesus of Nazareth would be born of the virgin Mary. Does the fact that it was a worthwhile thing make it right to go about seeking to get it this way? No! You see, sincerity does not excuse it. Eagerness does not excuse it. Even placing a high value is no excuse for a man to scheme to take things into his own hands like this. Now, Rebekah certainly was eager and sincere. She loved her son Jacob and wanted what was best for him. She believed what God had said, “the elder shall serve the younger,” but she was completely out of God’s will.

Remember the question that I asked concerning Sarai’s scheme? Did her scheme work? It did, didn’t it? A child was born and that was the whole idea. Did the schemes of Jacob and Rebekah work? Did Jacob get the birthright? He got it. It couldn’t be reversed. Did Jacob get that special paternal blessing? It worked, but because it worked was it right?

The Basis of New-Evangelicalism

I’m trying to give you some help in understanding the evils of new-evangelicalism. Don’t forget that it is part of the current theological thinking today that the end justifies the means. For example: saying “we’re trying to reach souls,” but ignoring what God has specifically said and confusing prophecy with commandment. You see, a limited concept of who God is, not understanding God’s purpose, will lead to this very same thing. Then, when someone brings up an objection:

“Hey, how come you put it over on your brother?”

“How come you gave Hagar to your husband?”

“Why did you tell your son to deceive his father?”

“Well, maybe it wasn’t exactly good sportsmanship, but you gotta admit it works!” This

is the argument that is being used today.

Remember that God's yardstick is not man's, and man's yardstick is not God's. If God is to be honored and properly glorified it is not by man trying to help God out but by being patient and willing to wait on the Lord, allowing God to perform according to His own will. "Wait, I say, on the Lord!" You walk a life of obedience and you will see God work.

Chapter III

Blessing Is Not Approval

EXAMPLES OF COMMON ERROR

Sincerity – Sacrifice – Schemes

Sarai had a limited understanding of who God is and only a partial understanding of His prophecy. Her ignorant impatience caused her to try to hurry God's program along. She was sincere and sacrificial and her plan produced results, but that did not make it right.

Jacob learned of the prophecy given to his mother, Rebekah, that the elder brother would serve the younger, and he contrived to take advantage of Esau to obtain the birthright.

Rebekah was not satisfied that her son only have the birthright, so she schemed to also obtain the paternal blessing from her husband Isaac. Jacob and his mother were certainly sincere and eager to get God's blessing. The birthright and the blessing did come to Jacob. However, did sincerity, eagerness, and achievement of results justify scheming, lying, and cheating? No! One of the underlying philosophies of new-evangelicalism is that when eager sincerity produces results that is evidence of God's blessing. I hope that you can see the fallacy of this idea!

The Peter Principle

Turn to the Book of Acts, chapter 5, verses 29 through 39. We read of the apostles' stand before the Sanhedrin.

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "**We ought to obey God rather than men.**" ³⁰The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. ³¹Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." (Acts 5:29-32)

Notice Peter's premise, his philosophy. Whom must he obey? **God** rather than men. Obedience was his responsibility. The consequences were in the hands of God. He might allow Peter to be thrown into prison or be whipped and scourged, but he must obey God rather than men. Now read on:

When they heard this, they were furious and took counsel to kill them. ³⁴ Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the

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apostles outside for a little while.

³⁵ And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. ³⁶ For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. ³⁷ After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. ³⁸ And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it; lest you even be found to fight against God." (Acts 5:33-39)

The Wisdom of Gamaliel

Please observe that Peter's position is entirely different from Gamaliel's. Peter's premise is obedience to God. Gamaliel's is that of expediency to avoid unpleasant consequences. The assumptions of this learned Jewish rabbi contain some elements of truth. In the ultimate, final, and eternal sense, God's counsel and work cannot be brought to naught by men; and, therefore, it is unwise to fight against God.

The philosophy underlying Gamaliel's advice is absolutely false. You may need to think about this awhile before you see it. In my effort to open your eyes to this horrible philosophy which once held me before the Lord delivered me, I am trying to point out from the Word of God the difference between the expediency of man and the revelation of God.

Don't Get Tricked

Listen carefully to this wise religious philosopher. Few, if anyone, today question that his advice might not be correct. What is he saying? "If this religion is of man, of man's origin, it is not going to succeed, and you won't have to worry about it. If it is of God, it is going to succeed, and you are wasting your time trying to hinder it."

I wonder if you believe that? Do you? Think about it! What about Mohammedanism? How old is it? Has it lasted? Is it growing? Has it succeeded? It has been very successful, hasn't it? But is it of God? Absolutely not! How about Roman Catholicism? It has its pomp and splendor. It's a big and powerful organization. It must be of God then, right? WRONG!

Will you agree that the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is of God? Alright. But wait a minute! World population annual increase is far out-stripping the progress of professing Christianity by any measure. As man counts success, Christianity is a failure. How successful was Christianity when the apostles were in prison? Did that mean it was no longer of God?

Please Take Heed

The new religion of new-evangelicalism accepts the wisdom of Gamaliel. I know because I sat on their councils, served on their committees, was personally acquainted with the thinking of the founders, and shared at least tacitly in making up programs and schedules for big conferences and conventions. I know how they employ the best methods of modern psychology and advertising to accomplish their goals. I can

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personally testify that this new religion is not of God.

Americans worship success. The world has no other way of measuring than progress, speed, numbers, and bigness. You can understand the liberal of a generation ago who observed, "The God of the narrow-minded Bible believers is a total failure in our time."

It burdens me to have dear Christian brethren come to me all excited because they've been impressed by some huge crusade or religious movement. Unsuspectingly they have been influenced by the wisdom of Gamaliel.

Terrible Consequence

Sad to say, but there are a lot of people lost and going to hell because they have followed Gamaliel's philosophy and not Peter's. "I'm sincere, I'm doing the best I can, and I seem to be doing alright. I follow the Golden Rule and everything is working out fine." Without exclusive dependence on the one and only Savior, this man is lost. No matter how much peace and satisfaction he gets out of life or his church, he is lost. Oh, may God deliver us from the wisdom of this world!

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Cor. 1:20-21)

It is equally tragic when believers accept the thinking of Gamaliel rather than Peter's "we must obey God." By the grace of God I want to have Peter's philosophy until I go to meet the Lord. Any Bible church that hopes to survive and perpetuate its testimony had better take Peter's premise.

Moses' Frustration and Disobedience

That expedience or achievement of results are not measures by which to gauge God's approval is further illustrated by the following incident from the life of Moses.

Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there.

² Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. ³ And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the **LORD**!

⁴ Why have you brought up the congregation of the **LORD** into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? ⁵ And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink."

⁶ So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the **LORD** appeared to them. ⁷ Then the **LORD** spoke to Moses, saying, ⁸ "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals."

⁹ So Moses took the rod from before the **LORD** as He commanded him. ¹⁰

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And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock; and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?”

¹¹ Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.

¹² Then the **LORD** spoke to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.” (Num. 20:1-12)

Turn now to Deuteronomy and we confirm God’s judgment on His servant despite this miraculous provision of water for Israel.

“The **LORD** was also angry with me for your sakes, saying, ‘Even you shall not go in there’....”But the **LORD** was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me. So the **LORD** said to me: ‘Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter’....”Furthermore the **LORD** was angry with me for your sakes, and swore that I would not cross over the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the **LORD** your God is giving you as an inheritance. ²² But I must die in this land, I must not cross over the Jordan; but you shall cross over and possess that good land. ²³ Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the **LORD** your God....”(Deut. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21-23a)

The people of Israel needed water. No question about that. They were moving on up the Sinai peninsula. They were murmuring against Moses. They had certainly tried his patience to the very breaking point. What did God instruct Moses to do? He said to **speak** to the rock. Did Moses obey God? No. In an evident fit of anger and desperation with the ungrateful people he said, “Hear now you rebels; must we bring you water out of this rock?” Then he took his rod and smote the rock. Now, think about this: did it work? Yes, it worked. God would not allow His people to die of thirst in the wilderness. He was gracious and brought the water forth. But was God pleased with this?

God’s Blessing Is Not His Approval

Three times we saw that it is recorded that God was angry with Moses. For the sake of the people that witnessed his disobedience, it was necessary for God to prohibit him from crossing the Jordan River and leading the people into the promised land. Moses would have to die on this side of the river. Hence we learn that God’s gracious favor is not necessarily evidence of His approval.

Can you grasp this? The devil has so much of the Bible-believing segment of Christendom so wrapped up in existentialism and humanism that the average Christian does not even bother to think about “thus saith the Lord.” All you hear about is “well it seems to work, they’re getting results.”

However, even when God gets some people saved where wrong methods are used, He does not approve of the method nor condone the disobedient servants involved. God pointed out to Moses and Aaron, “You did not sanctify or honor Me.” Remember the whole purpose of Christian service is not in how much you can do for man but to reveal who God is!

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The Importance of the Witness

God loved Moses. He had chosen him, had strengthened him, and had led him through so much. Imagine forty years presiding over, leading, and prophesying to a disobedient, stiff-necked, murmuring, complaining people! What Moses had to put up with! You and I probably would have cracked long before. But God said specifically, "Speak to the rock." Moses smote it and dishonored God before His people. What God's man does is very important because his whole being is to be a witness unto who God is.

Reflect on one implication of this incident. Quite a few years prior to this the Israelites were without water and God instructed Moses to smite the rock and water came forth. Of whom is the rock a type? We sing, "Rock of Ages cleft for me." It is a type, a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was smitten on the cross of Calvary. He's not to be smitten again. To receive the Living Water of eternal life you only have to speak. Ask and it shall be given. See what implications Moses' disobedience had for God's marvelous pre-shadow of our Lord?

Chapter IV

No Partnership with a Religion of Compromise

IMPLICATIONS OF TRUE OBEDIENCE

The Old Testament for Today

It was some time before the early churches had the New Testament. The first Christian believers were taught by the apostles from the Old Testament. They cherished it and fed on it. It is surprising to us today how they were able to function, in so many ways stand up to Judaism, heathenism, and gnosticism, and to withstand government persecution. We make a great mistake today by our regrettable neglect of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament did so much in delivering me from the philosophies of new-evangelicalism, chiefly by causing me to become acquainted with who God is. When I came to see that the thinking of the early leaders in this new religion was inconsistent with the revelation of God in the Scriptures, I began to withdraw from this counterfeit.

Most Christians are aware of 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Unless you also are aware of the Old Testament record, the centuries of God's dealing with His people, of which this is just the capstone, then the full force of this injunction will not be brought home to your heart as it ought. It is imperative that we acquaint ourselves with all the Bible in its dispensational format, recognizing principles concerning God and His purposes that never, never change. God has not changed since Jesus came or even since He ascended back into heaven. He is the same God. One who judges sin severely, a God of grace and mercy, and absolutely sovereign.

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Hurry Up, God, I'm in a Hurry!

We have studied about the impatience of Sarai, how her limited concept of who God is and ignorance of His purpose led her to devise her own method of doing God's work. Oh, how we need to teach our young people these lessons from the Word of God that they might come to know who God is intellectually and be stirred emotionally. David came to know who God is and we have such marvelous expressions in the Psalms because he could not help but fear God in His majesty. He could not help but praise and rejoice in the God of his salvation.

The Bible reveals that God is not usually in the hurry that we Americans are in. I am reminded of the Chinese evangelist who commented that he thought all Americans were Russians. Since coming to our country, he had found that we were always "rushin'" here, "rushin'" there!

A missionary who labored many years with meager results testified how he was pacing the floor on into the night. Finally his wife couldn't stand it any longer and demanded to know what the trouble was. "My trouble is that I'm in a hurry and God is not," he replied.

A Little Review

We learned from Sarai's experience the danger of the arguments of sincerity, sacrifice, and pragmatism, these arguments of new-evangelicalism that I once was so deep into. I shudder every time I think of how deep I was into that thing years ago. I am less concerned about reports of new-evangelical activities than I am about having this virus get into me again.

Remember Jacob and his mother? They believed God, didn't they? They put a high premium on what God had promised and their scheme seemed to work. Did that make it right? The scheming of Sarai and Rebekah denied them the privilege of seeing God at work for His own glory and there have been serious consequences ever since.

We have considered the expedient philosophy of Gamaliel which is so prevalent today, assuming that if something persists it must be from God. This is the yardstick of men. We consider these things not to try to find fault with certain individuals but to rid ourselves of this insidious virus, as Paul wrote to Timothy, "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:16).

The tragic response of Moses to his frustration with an ungrateful people taught us that though God may use a man, that does not necessarily mean that He approves of that man. God's favor or blessing is not to be construed as His approval. I wish America would face up to this truth. God has allowed us to be prosperous, strong, and free, but that does not mean that He is pleased by what we have become or what we do.

Rebuilding of the Temple

The Jews had been in captivity for a period of 70 years and God raised up a Persian monarch by the name of Cyrus, who in the first year of his reign issued an edict that the Jews who so desired could go back to their own land. There they could rebuild the temple of God and fellowship together. Now they had returned. Their leader was Zerubbabel and they began to lay out a foundation to restore Solomon's temple which had been destroyed. They had a great time of celebration amidst the ashes and rubble. They arranged to have several hundred in the choir, men and women, to sing the praises of the

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Lord, and they sang concerning God's grace and mercy which endure forever. This was only the foundation and there was so much more to do.

The Neighbors' Request

We read in Ezra, chapter 4:

They came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here." (verse 2)

Along come their neighbors who profess to have the same religion and would like to enter a partnership of temple building. These were the Samaritans. They claim to worship the living and true God. In fact, they profess to have sacrificed to God for over a century and a quarter, since the days of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon.

But you see, this was not just a matter of deciding on applications for construction employment. This was a matter of partnership, a joint religious effort in building the temple. How should Zerubbabel answer? Modern Christians might think this was a fine gesture by the Samaritans. "This is an important project, building God's temple, we need all the help we can get. Sure, count these folks in."

Zerubbabel's Response

However, notice what Zerubbabel replied:

But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the **LORD** God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us." (Ezra 4:3)

Well, thank God for men of conviction and backbone and above all of understanding who God is and what His purposes are! "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God!" The Word of God says (Prov. 3:5), "Trust in the **LORD**...[*how much?*]...with all your heart... [*and then what?*]...and lean not to your own understanding." It is not for us to establish our own opinions or make our own assumptions based on the importance we attach to evangelism or some other project. Our answer to the mixed multitude must be, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God."

Human Rationale

Someone might have argued, "The Samaritans do seem to profess to believe as we do despite some weaknesses and shortcoming in their theology. We ought to show them kindness. After all, it's our duty to be kind and loving." This is how the new-evangelical rationale treats unbelief and heresy. "After all, they believe much the same way we do," and so they will countenance speaking in tongues, the healing quacks, and almost anything in the name of tolerance. "We've got to be loving. We shouldn't be stuffed shirts. We shouldn't have a 'holier than thou' attitude."

Can you appreciate now more clearly the implications of Paul's exhortation, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers"? He was putting a capstone on a long history of events in the Old Testament.

Here's another tricky argument. "By working together with us, they are the ones who

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will be doing the compromising, not us!” “Maybe by working together we can be of help to them, bolster up what might be lacking in their faith. How can we help them if we can’t get close to them?” Have you heard that before? Perhaps you’ve had those very thoughts yourself. I hope you haven’t swallowed such a rationale.

Present a Good Image

How about this one? “A joint enterprise avoids contention, makes for harmony and presents a good image to the community. Don’t forget, we’ll be in charge. We can keep everything under control and what an impact when the town feels our presence!” Zerubbabel’s answer: “You have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God!” ***Separation? Yes, next to the doctrine of God Himself it is the most prominent doctrine in the Bible!*** Unfortunately, it is often abused by the few who recognize it and misunderstood or ignored by the rest.

The Consequences

Can you imagine what would have happened if the Samaritans had been brought in? They wouldn’t have taken long to introduce their ideas on the architectural layout or the furnishings. You certainly wouldn’t want to offend them. Maybe you’d even let them have a little alcove for one of their idols.

Verses 4 and 5 (Ezra 4) reveal the true nature of the mixed multitude. The desire of their heart was to sabotage the work of God. They had no sincere desire to see the work of the Lord advanced at all. As soon as their request was denied, they began to frustrate the efforts of God’s people.

The Samaritan Religion

Do you know what their religion was? Were they telling the truth when they claimed to worship God and offer sacrifices to Him? You know, Jesus once said to a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, “You don’t know what you believe!” (John 4:22)

The story is found in 2 Kings 17:23b-41. The northern kingdom of Israel had been taken away into captivity by Assyria. Just a ragged remnant of Israelites remained in the land. The king of Assyria brought in people of various nationalities with their many religions and idols to resettle the country. During the transition wild animals became a nuisance, especially lions. The lions terrorized the new population and in their desperation they petitioned the emperor. They complained that they didn’t understand how to appease the gods of the new territory and thus the lions ran rampant. The emperor responded by sending back an Israelite priest from captivity, who promptly set up headquarters at Bethel, the center for calf worship since the days of Jeroboam I. The priest’s assignment was to teach the people how to worship the god of the territory, who was known as Jehovah. What were the results of this “missionary” effort?

“They feared the **LORD**, yet served their own gods; according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.” (2 Kings 17:33)

God Hates Hash!

They feared the **LORD** and served their own gods. What a mixture! Believe me, God hates hash in religion. These Samaritans feared God and made sacrifices to Him alright,

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but they also sacrificed to all other gods. One thing you learn about God in the Old Testament is that He hates mixture, and He hasn't changed His mind in 1975 [*or in 1994!*] *Phew!* Am I old fashioned? And narrow and peculiar? I confess to it all!

If you had been delivered out of this kind of thinking and compromise, then you wouldn't want any part of it either. You wouldn't even want to get close to it again. It is like the testimonies we hear from saved people who have been delivered from one or more worldly habits. They want no part of anything that reminds them of the old days. I shudder every time I think of how this alien philosophy, a counterfeit of apostolic Christianity, once began as a virus to infect my mind and soul.

In these days of tremendous confusion it is essential to go back to the Book. Don't formulate an opinion and then go to the Bible to find support for it. ***Get to know God's Word and let Him formulate your opinions!***