SOME OLD DOCTRINES RESTATED AND EXAMINED

R. L. WHITESIDE

Direct Spiritual Influence

The baptism of the Apostles in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was not for their special good; but it enabled them to be of service to others. They were baptized in the Holy Spirit to enable them to fulfill their mission as apostles. Through them the Holy Spirit revealed the gospel, speaking, when occasion demanded it, in languages the apostles did not know. It seems that they did not always understand what the Spirit said through them. As God is not now calling and sending out apostles, no one is now baptized in the Holy Spirit. And yet it seems that some preachers talk more about “Holy Ghost baptism” than they do about Jesus the Christ. But the Holy Spirit, in his first sermon spoken through the apostles, preached Christ, and said nothing about Holy Ghost baptism or any other direct operation of the Spirit. Follow up the activities of the apostles and other inspired men, and you will see that these inspired men never told sinners that they must have “Holy Ghost baptism” or must be regenerated by a direct work of the Holy Spirit. There is a striking difference between their preaching and much of the preaching of today. One wonders what would happen to the preacher and his hearers if in the midst of the sermon the Holy Spirit should suddenly take possession of the vocal organs of the preacher and do the preaching!

After the incidents of Acts 2 the next recorded sermon is found in Acts 8. When a lame man had been healed, a crowd came together. Peter preached to them, and again reminded them that they had killed the Christ. The Holy Spirit was speaking through Peter. He did not tell them they must have “Holy Ghost baptism” or must be regenerated by a direct work of the Spirit, or must be born of the Spirit; neither did he tell them they could do nothing. But he did say, “Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” If they did what the Holy Spirit commanded, they were led by the Holy Spirit.

Now read Stephen’s speech in Acts 7. It is said of Stephen that he was “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” “And Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought great wonders and signs among the people.” “And they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake.” (Read Acts 6:5, 8, 10). These verses show that Stephen had the power of the Holy Spirit upon him, and that the Holy Spirit spoke through him. His sermon was really a sermon spoken by the Holy Spirit. The Holy
Spirit depended on words to convict the people. **In the** sermon nothing was said about regeneration by a direct work of the Holy Spirit. It was said—"Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye." And the next verse shows that their fathers resisted the Holy Spirit by persecuting and killing the prophets through whom the Spirit spoke; and the council was resisting the Holy Spirit in the same way. And they proceed to demonstrate the truth of Stephen's statement, for they proceeded at once to kill him. People resist the Holy Spirit by resisting his words, nor could they resist him in any other way. No man could resist a direct impact of Almighty Power.

Read Acts 8:1-13. When the disciples were driven out of Jerusalem by a great persecution, Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ to the people. Nothing is said about the Holy Spirit regenerating the people to enable them to believe; but Luke does say, "But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Philip preached, the people believed, and were baptized. So far as the record shows the gospel was the only power brought to bear on them. The signs he performed attracted the attention of the people, and confirmed the preaching; but the preaching produce faith, and led to obedience. One thing is certain, and that is, these Samaritans had not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, or received any direct operation of the Holy Spirit before they were baptized: they did not receive any direct operation of the powers of the Holy Spirit till some days later when Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and laid hands on them.

In the conversion of the eunuch (Acts 8:26-40) an angel told Philip to "go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza." When he reached the designated point, there came into view a man of Ethiopia, the treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia. He was reading a portion of the prophet Isaiah. An angel had directed Philip to this point. Now the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near, and **join** thyself to this chariot." Philip said to the man, "**Understandest** thou what thou readest?" And he said, "Why, can I, except some one **shall** guide me?" Had Philip been imbued with the doctrine of total depravity he would have informed the eunuch that he could not understand what God says until he was regenerated, or made alive by a direct work of the 'Spirit; but fortunately Philip was under the influence of the Holy Spirit, not total depravity doctrine. So he guided the eunuch to an understanding by beginning from the scripture the eunuch was reading, and preaching to him Jesus, with such force and clearness that the eunuch said, "Behold, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" What hinders anyone to be baptized? Philip did not ask him, "Have you been regenerated by a direct work of the Spirit?" A lack of faith is the only thing that hinders anyone to be baptized. Philip had preached to him to produce faith: he believed and was baptized. Then he rejoiced.

Luke records the conversion of Saul in Acts 9:1-19. 'Saul, or Paul, gives an account of his conversion in Acts 22:1-16; 26:1-19. The student should read and compare these three accounts. Equipped with letters of authority from the chief priests, Saul was on his way to Damascus to bring bound to Jerusalem all the disciples in that city. As he neared Damascus about noon a great light shone about him, so intensely bright that it blinded him and he fell to the earth. A voice said to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads." And Paul said, "Who art thou, Lord?" He fell to the earth, because he knew he was in the presence of a heavenly being, though he did not know who it was. A book in the days when many of the denominations thought of conversion as a sort of convulsion, they said Saul was struck down. One preacher said, "Saul was knocked clean off his horse." (He was not riding.) Recently a preacher said Saul was born again on the highway.
because Paul said, “... and last of all, as to the child untimely born, he appeared to me also.” (I Cor. 15:8) Now is there, can there be, such a thing as an untimely spiritual birth? The thought is absurd. The meaning is that the Lord’s appearing to him was Untimely. It had been a number of years since he had appeared in person to any one. He was not saved when he saw the light. It was not spiritual light shining in his heart-shone round about him a light brighter than the sun. If he were saved-born again at that moment, he was saved before he knew the Lord, or even believed in him; for he said, “Who art thou, Lord?” Neither had he received the Holy Spirit; for in Damascus Ananias said to him, “Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, who appeared unto thee in the way which thou camest, hath sent me that thou mayest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” But one preacher recently said, “Ananias” called Saul brother; he was a brother in Christ when Ananias came to him.” Such talk does not appear to be honest. Paul addressed as “brethren” and fathers” the mob that had been trying to kill him. (Acts 22:21). See also such passages as Acts 2:29, 37, 3:17; 7:2; 13:15; 26:38; 38:1, and other passages. Paul considered all Jews as his kinsmen and brethren. Neither the brilliant light nor Saul’s blindness converted him, but that experience put him in a proper frame of mind to give heed to what he heard. He could not believe till the Lord said, “I am Jesus whom thou persecute&” He believed on that testimony-his faith came by hearing, and not by having it put into his heart by some mysterious operation. Then Saul said, “What shall I do, Lord?” The Lord said, “Arise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” Notice the emphatic “must do.” In the city he was three days without sight, and so great was his distress of mind that he neither ate nor drank. Ananias came and said to him, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name.” “And he arose and was baptized: and he took food and was strengthened.” Only then was his mind at ease, and his heart glad. If he had been saved on the highway, he would have gone into Damascus happy, even though he was blind; but he went into the city deserted and sad, blind both physically and spiritually, and remained so till Ananias led him into the light.

In the case of Cornelius (Acts 10; 11:1-18) he was divinely guided to send for Peter. The angel said to Cornelius, “Send to Joppa, and fetch Simon, whose surname is Peter. who shall speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house.” While Peter spoke to Cornelius and those with him, the Holy Spirit fell on them with miraculous power; but that was not to save him, for they were to be saved by the words which Peter spoke to them. Peter told them what to do to be saved, and set motives before them to induce them to act. The gospel is God’s power to save, and that was the power that was brought to bear on them.

At Iconium Paul and Barnabas “entered together into the synagogue of the Jews, and spake that a great multitude of Jews and of Greeks believed.” The miracles and signs performed through them confirmed the truthfulness of their preaching, but it was their preaching that caused many to believe. (See Acts 14:1-3). No matter how many other things may happen to a person, he cannot believe in Jesus Christ if he has never heard of him. (Rom. 10:14-17)

“And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there: And she constrained us.” (Acts 16:13-15).

To get the whole story of Lydia’s conversion in mind, consider some things that led up to Paul’s preaching in Philippi. After leaving Iconium the Spirit of the Lord kept Paul and his company on a direct course to Troas. Here “a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There was work committed to them. These points are plainly stated in II Cor. 5:18-20. Christ’s chosen ambassadors were acting on his behalf, persuading men to be reconciled to God. Said Jesus, “He that heareth you heareth me.” (Luke 10:16). And Jesus sent Paul to open the eyes of people, and to turn them from darkness to light. (Acts 26:16-18). Paul tells the Ephesians that they had formerly had the eyes of their heart enlightened. (Eph. 1:18). Hence, to open the heart is to open the eyes of the heart. That was done by preaching, for that was the only way Paul could open the eyes of people. Lydia was a worshipper of God, but did not know Christ. Through Paul’s preaching Lydia’s heart was opened. Before it is said that the Lord opened her heart, it is said that she “heard us.” Denominational preachers assume that, the Lord opened Lydia’s heart by a direct operation of the Spirit, and a direct work of the Spirit; then why did not the Spirit operate on those who shamefully treated Paul and Silas? They certainly needed regenerating.

Notice Paul’s work at Thessalonica, (Acts 17:1-9). He preached three sabbath days in the synagogue of the Jews, proving to them Jesus is the Christ. Notice verse 4: “And some of them were persuaded.” His preaching persuaded them...
to obey the gospel. They were not so depraved that they could not be persuaded to accept Jesus as the Christ. Christ gives life to those who come to him, and sinners are not so dead that they cannot come. On one occasion Jesus said to some dead sinners, "Ye will not come to me, ye have not the Spirit." (John 5:40). These people would not be persuaded to come to Christ, that they might have life; but many at Thessalonica were persuaded to come to Christ, that they might have life. They did not have life, and then come; they came, that they might have life.

Now read Acts 17:10-12). The Bereans "received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so. Many of them therefore believed." Notice the force of therefore. They believed because they received the word with all readiness of mind. They did not believe because they had received a direct work of the Spirit, but because they received the word of God.

Of Paul's labors at Corinth it is said, "And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was constrained by the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ." The result is stated in verse 8: "And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house, and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." To these Corinthians Paul preached Jesus as the Christ. He did not preach inherited depravity or the direct operation of the Spirit in regeneration. "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." (I Cor. 2:2-4) "Demonstration of the Spirit and of power" was not an invisible operation, but a demonstration—a proof—that his preaching was from God. He conferred spiritual gifts and worked miracles. To this church he wrote, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works." (II Cor. 12:12) But these were demonstrations — proof — that Paul's preaching was from God, but only Paul's preaching gave life. "For though ye have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I begat you through the gospel." (I Cor. 4:15) That settles one thing — spiritual life was not generated in them by a direct operation of the Spirit.

Inspired preachers did not tell sinners that they were so depraved by nature that they could not obey the gospel till they were made dive by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or that they must first have an experience of grace, or that they must be baptized in the Holy Spirit. If they did, Luke failed to record it; yet it is the main burden of a lot of preaching these days. In fact, some preachers talk more about the Holy Spirit than about the Savior. The Holy Spirit in God's chosen preachers did not preach himself, but Christ Jesus. In preaching through these chosen preachers, the Holy Spirit depended on the gospel to convert sinners: and he himself said through Paul that the gospel is God's power unto salvation.
A lot of people are not impressed by E. WALLACE before you can do something. And first, will you do me a favor? There's about but ye saw in me, and now you, what did 'the doctor matters, that is really the basis of de-

The thing that leads us astray in many religious matters, that is really the basicity of the divine order, is the fact that God's plan measured by human wisdom doesn't look impressive enough. We are not willing to abide by it. A lot of people are not impressed by religion unless it is put in statistics, or in the form that makes a big impression. I hear people, sometimes good people, zealous people, say we are not doing anything, that we ought to "do" something. Well, of course, people ought to do, but there is something that is more important than doing, and that is being. You've got to be something before you can do something. And what you are is not always manifest at first glance.

I think I can illustrate that point. In one of the larger cities here was an elder, a very able man, very devout and understanding elder in the church. One man came to this elder and said, "I don't want to be a hypocrite, and I am not getting anything out of the church, it doesn't mean much to me, I don't feel it, I am discouraged, and I am just going to quit." This elder, a man of very great discernment, said, 'Well, we're mighty 'sorry about that, but he said if that's the way you feel we wouldn't request you to continue as a member of this congregation—but first, will you do me a favor? There's a family down on a certain street, at a certain number, that I have been rather quietly looking after, I haven't brought it before the church; but the man there is sick and out of work; he has a family, a wife and some children, and they are always in need; I have been supplying, as a sort of personal matter, some of their needs; I haven't seen them in several days; take this money, find out what they need, and get it." The brother went down there, walked in, looked the situation over, asked a few questions, sat down and talked and observed the conditions, went off, took the money the elder had given him, added about twice that much of his own, supplied the needs of that family, and came back to the elder and said: "I get the point, I have the lesson: don't take my name off the church book; I think I have found out exactly what's the matter with me."

Things like that don't look big enough to some people. Names that never go into statistics, that never go into the reports in the paper, work that's done that nobody knows about but the individual himself, make up most of the power of Christianity and its influence over the live6 of men.

I recall some months ago that the congregation where I lived mailed a check, I believe for $309.00, to an orphan's home. It was proudly announced, 'Why the contribution to that was $300.00" A short time after that one of the women of the church came to the house and 'knocked, and said, "Bro. Wallace, I want to talk to you." I said, "All right, what about-money?" "Well," she said, "you know about the woman way down there in a certain section with all of those children," Well, I knew this woman; performed her wedding ceremony in Weatherford a way back in 1918, and they've been having children ever since, there have been about 13 in all. The man is a veteran of World War I, and he had a etroke here some three or four years ago, and is in the Veteran's Hospital. I had observed that woman; she was always at the meetings of the church, and I wondered how in the world she got along. She had six or seven children right there at home; she was working to make a living, but she just couldn't make the grade, and had become ill. I said, "I'll go down and see her." I walked in and I said, "How are you getting along?" "Not doing so well," I said, "What's the matter with you, what did 'the doctor say?" She was rather vague, and I said, "To tell the truth about it, I don't think you're much sick, I think you're worried to death. How much grocery bill do you owe, that you can't pay?" She said there was about eighty or ninety dollars in all, and...
they were pressing her for the money and she didn't have it. I said, *How much have you got here in the house to eat?* She broke down and went to crying, no food, no milk, not anything. I said, "You get me those grocery bills." The treasurer of the church wrote a check to pay those bills, and sent her a check in addition to that. And I came back to her and said, "Now, quit worrying, get well, go on doing the best you can, and when you need help, let us know about it."

We need to know that real religion consists of a lot of little things, little from the standpoint of the world, that do not make as good reading as some big institutional report does. God intended that his work should be done for the individual through the local church and not through some human institution. In other words, God thinks more of a half dozen people that love him and serve him by carrying on his work in a scriptural way than he does some great big outfit, regardless of how big a temple they own, or how much resources they have accumulated, and how much worldly impression they are able to make.

But that is not really what I intended to talk about tonight, so I'll get to it.

**THE PROBLEM OF DIVISION**

That problem of division. I don't know how many places I have been called where the church was divided. Much of the teaching of the New Testament on the unity question is directed to the local congregation. In the Philippians letter the apostle said: "If there is there amongst you any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through faction or through vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind, each counting other better than himself." Divisions in the church, cleavages and schisms in a congregation, can do a lot to neutralize God's plan. Paul said, "as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body being many, are one body; so also is Christ," and, "Now hath God set the members each one of them in the body, even as it pleased him;" and, "there should be no schism," no torn or rent places in the body; no divisions among you, but be "joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

One time I was called to Dallas, over there at Sears and Summit, for a meeting. I got off the train on Sunday morning. The first thing I knew about it, Clarence Cockrell Orote the news gently to me that the church had split wide open the Sunday before. They hadn't told anybody, Out the preacher and about a hundred members had pulled off, and everybody was mad enough to kill everybody else. I felt a whole lot like the colored fellow did that went to the bank to cash a check. When he passed his check in, the teller said, 'This bank is insolvent; the last check has been paid.' He said, 'You means to tell me that this here bank is busted?' The teller said, 'That's what we mean—it's closed.' The colored man said, 'Well, that's the first time I've ever had a bank to bust right in my face!' Now that church had busted right in my face. 'Well, of course, we spent all the time in that meeting talking about personal matters and wrestling with problems that ought never have existed, We ought to have been free, with the church behind the work, to try to convert others and make Christians out of somebody else. Time after time we find those problems of divisions. What's the cause of them? They are problems—personalities, divisions, parties, factional spirit, and all that.

**THE LEADERSHIP PROBLEM**

Many times I find that "referendum and a recall" problem, somebody in the church dissatisfied with the leadership, dissatisfied with the elders—especially if the elders won't go off into some sort of scheme they have concocted and consider very important—and there will be insurrection in a spirit of rebellion, an appeal to the majority rule, the mob spirit, and manifestations of the wildest sort of democracy. We've seen that. I don't suppose that any big problems have arisen that caused a lot of divisions, such as digression and things like that, that weren't accompanied by an appeal to the majority rule ignoring the fact that the New Testament teaches that a church should be under the elders, under the oversight of men of age, experience and wisdom, and scriptural qualifications, the to the work to be directed by them. The younger should submit to the older, but its got to where the elders submit to the young people, in a good many instances, or will engage a preacher they hear about without too much regard for his qualifications, his background, or his reputation. They call him in and turn their work over to him. Then the first thing they know he has taken their work away and when they try to get it back, they see the mistake they have made, try to right it, and they've got trouble. An appeal is then made to the inexperienced and the thoughtless, and a faction built up in a party spirit around the preacher, is the result—a situation that will always bring many years of trouble.

Sometimes you will find a church that has reached a point of saturation in a community. It looks like they have baptized about all the people they can baptize, they've reached the static stage; and then they get into a rut, the
spirit of restlessness and of dissatisfaction arises, and you have a perfect set-up for division. Then sometimes we'll find that an old church will begin to disintegrate and show signs of senility; they begin to die instead of constantly being rejuvenated and built up in their spiritual life. All these matters will result in the evil that we know as division, and these are all problems that center in leadership.

THE PROBLEM OF UNDERCOVER ACTIVITIES

A good many divisions are caused by men slipping in, or sneaking in, or acting along lines of sabotage, stirring up a rebellion in favor of false principles and false doctrines. There is the doctrine that we know as premillennialism. You know its got to where in a good many places people don't want to hear that name. Any system of religion that has to have a name that long to describe, I can't get much enthused over it, to say the least of it. But premillennialism is not dead. I think I made the remark in an article here awhile back, a sort of a wisecrack, that you couldn't find the track of one that wasn't too cold for a hound to smell, but the truth of the matter is they have just gone under cover. You know a movement sometimes can just go underground. You can think you have it whipped out, but premillennialism is a peculiar thing. I remember being called for a meeting over at a certain town, I could tell you where it was, and I could tell you who had been holding their meetings, for that was what the matter with them, but I won't do that-it isn't nice to call names anyhow-but they called me over there for a meeting. A truck driver (I like truck drivers, but sometimes when they are elders of the church and think they are too smart, they can do some mighty silly things) wrote me that he wanted to request me to say nothing about premillennialism. I knew, of course, exactly what they needed. On Sunday morning I said, "We're going to have a special service tonight, and I want to give you fair warning. I'm going to preach on premillennialism. I am going to preach an hour and a half, and it is going to be just as hot as well, it's going to be hotter—and if you don't feel like you can stand it, stay away." One of the elders said to another, "I knew he'd do it. I knew he'd do it. I tried to tell you not to write him that letter." Well, the biggest crowd they had during the Week was there, end the weather was hot, and the sermon was hotter. Everybody was interested in it. I didn't go back there for another meeting, and as far as that's concerned, I didn't want to, and didn't mean to because I said everything I knew in that meeting.

But uninformed people say, 'Well, what's the need of bringing up these old dead issues?' Do you know what premillennialism is? Now, I am not going to discuss that tonight, because I am talking to people who are well informed and well warned on the matter, but premillennialism is a system of such character that a man who knows what it is, and believes it, cannot believe the gospel. A premillennialist does not believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of Cod. When I make a statement of that sort somebody says, "Why, that is one of the wildest, most radical statements I ever heard-why all of them believe that." Ask a premillennialist if he believes that Jesus is the Christ the Son of Cod, and he will say, of course, that he does, that we all believe that. But they don't 'do anything of the kind. I can take their books, take their teaching, and prove that they believe in a composite Christ, that the Christ is "Jesus and the church", a composite 'Christ. Well, that's just one point. The system denies that the kingdom of Daniel 2:44 has been set up. Jesus Christ preached its near approach and said the time was fulfilled; John the baptizer, and the disciples, during the personal ministry, preached that the kingdom was at hand; and Jesus even went so far as to say that it would be set up while some of them lived, but millenialists say the kingdom was postponed; that it was not set up, that Cod defaulted on his promises; that Jesus went to heaven and instead of being crowned as king in heaven, he is king by right only, not in act, fact, or might; not exercising authority as king at all, and will not until he comes again; that the Roman Empire, old pagan Rome, must arise again, be re-established, (before the kingdom can be set up. Furthermore, Solomon's temple must be rebuilt, Judaism restored, requiring an interchange of shadow and type. In other words Christianity is the antitype and Judaism was the type, but Judaism, the type, is coming back, the Jews will be converted and restored to Palestine, their old worship re-established with all the nationalism they ever had-all of which is an integral part of the premillennial system. Yet the comparatively few brethren who embraced that materialistic idea a good many years ago, just keep hammering away on it, refusing to renounce their materialism or abandon their divisive work. Yet St the same time, they conceal their activities in various places, and do a work of sabotage, creeping in unawares, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples, rising right up in our own midst at every opportunity, and all that sort of thing. Well, that is a congregational issue-a real problem of under-cover agents in the churches.

The trademarks of the system are to be seen in its fruits. They will invariably evade the issue 'by their stock remark: "Oh, I don't believe the theory but"—but they do all they can to help the party!
But they want us to refrain from mentioning premillennialism, and exposing its character and consequences. Suppose Adventism is running rampant through a community, and the brethren tell me not to say anything about the Adventists, or Jehovah’s Witnesses, if they happen to be overrunning a section of the country, just don’t mention them. That is out of harmony with the entire spirit of the New Testament. It is just plain pitiful to think about how many deviations from the principles of New Testament teaching there are in the system, and instead of brethren hush-hushing the proposition, they ought to cry out against it and spare none of its teaching or its teachers. A system that has so many doctrinal deviations from fundamentals, accompanied by a softness and an attitude that is contrary to the spirit of New Testament constitutes a doctrinal problem. It still is and we ought to be alert regarding those things.

Paul said to the elders of the church, “Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” Regarding these false teachers, Paul called them grievous wolves, and they were members of the church. Every so often we read an article from some brother who says we should never speak unkindly of any member of the church, always treat him as a brother. Well, I don’t go ‘round indiscriminately calling the brethren wolves, but you know, Paul called certain men in the Ephesian church wolves, and he called some of them in the Philippian church dogs. Was he unkind? You know, he was mighty good to the folks that needed kindness; he was protecting the flock against the inroads of the wolves-destructive men who were seducers. Was Jesus unkind? He said, “Beware of false prophets that come to you In sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves;” and “by their fruits ye shall know them.” I ought not to call a man a wolf unless he is, and you ought not to refer to anybody as a dog unless he is, and then only when it is necessary. But to say that under no circumstances shall any language of that sort be used toward anybody, and take a passage of scripture and apply it to a situation that was never intended to forbid it—well, Paul did things like that, and Christ did things like that, “Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ,” and “stand fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel.”

The faith of the gospel is a system, once for all delivered, not to be chsmged modified or altered. It is not to be trimmed and remodeled to meet the changing conditions of any age. The gospel is a static proposition, its facts are unchangeable, its commands are dogmatic and its promises are definite and sure.

**THE PROBLEMS OF THE SECULAR AGE**

The church has always been influenced by environment, always. It was so in New Testament times, the environment of the Roman Empire had a lot to do with the final apostasy; the problems of the early church in matters of doctrine came from environment, many of them—Judaism on one hand and paganism on the other. The heresies that plagued the church during the first century came out of Judaism and paganism. Catholicism itself is a strange mixture of Judaism and paganism with a little bit of Christianity. Today the church is influenced a lot by environment and the secular spirit of the age, in economic and social matters.

The secular spirit can be illustrated even from the New Testament. Paul told Timothy to “charge them that are rich in this world that they be not highminded, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, and may lay hold on the life to come.” Jesus stuck right at the heart of it when a young man came to him and wanted to be his disciple, asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus looked at him and saw something that the young man didn’t even know he had, and his friends perhaps were not aware of it—an inordinate love for money. Paul said, “They that are minded to be rich fall into the temptation and snares and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as dross men in ‘destruction and perdition.” Jesus told the young man if he would be perfect, to sell what he had, give it to the poor and “come and follow me.” When the choice was put up to him, he found out that he loved what he had more than he loved the Lord and his cause. That ended that.

The secular spirit of the age—a man had a piece of ground that brought forth plentifully, and had nowhere to bestow his grain and his goods. He said he would pull down his barns and build greater barns, and with the produce of the soil, he said, “Soul, thou hast many goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry.” The man made three mistakes. He thought he could feed his soul on corn. Well, you can’t do that. “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” He thought he had an unlimited time to live. God said, “Thou fool, this night is thy soul required of thee: the things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be?
So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” You remember that Jesus said that the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things choke out the word and it becomes unfruitful. Well, look at the church, in any community where you go—the condition is more pronounced in some places than others—we have to make a living, we have to eat, we have to wear clothes, we have to pay bills, and all. That’s legitimate, a man is to look after his affairs and all that, but are we putting the things of the kingdom first? After a man gets through with his business and his social engagements, and attends to the things that have to do with the material, with the secular, he doesn’t have any time for meeting, doesn’t have any time to attend to the Lord’s business, doesn’t have any money left for the church. That’s what I mean by the secular spirit of the age, allowing these other matters to crowd out. You can’t serve God and mammon. I can give you names and post office addresses of some people who spend more money for baby sitters so they can go to bridge games and social affairs than they give to the church.

**THE PROBLEM OF GIVING**

Secular things are legitimate in their own place and a properly circumscribed zone, but the things of the kingdom come first. What we do for the church in money and time, is just “dipping” the Lord a little on the side.

Talking on the matter of giving, Paul said it should be by equality. I take it that that would mean time, and mean money, and things of that sort, that all cannot do the same thing, because all do not have the same ability. You know equality doesn’t mean the same amount. I heard that illustrated one time, but I won’t vouch for this story; there is a little element of the story that I have always doubted, but I’m going to tell it. A man was making a very fervent appeal for a worthy cause, and it touched the hearts of the people. They passed around the hat, and there were two fellows sitting back side by side, one was a millionaire and the other was a day laborer. The day laborer put in ten dollars, and the millionaire put in ten dollars, but they didn’t give equally at all. Now here is the part of the story I’m not so sure about. As the story went, the next day the poor man got a telegram that a rich uncle had died and left him a million dollars. The millionaire got a telegram from his mother-in-law that she was coming to stay with him for six months. And the moral was, “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Too much ambition to accumulate things for our own use and for our own selfish interests, and all that, interferes with the Work of the church. You know, sacrifice means something, and the secular spirit will cancel out in too many instances the spirit of sacrifice.

**THE PREACHER’S AND ELDER’S PROBLEMS**

You know, there is a difference in the preaching problem and the problem of the preacher. You take a preacher’s problem, any conscientious preacher has his problems, and that doesn’t mean he is trying to run things, but a lot of members of the church make themselves a problem for the preacher. Nobody should want to be a problem to the church. But I find members of the church who have the wrong attitude. They think it is the preacher’s business to look after them. The church will turn a lot of work over to the preacher that the members ought to do, and there are some people in the church with 80 sensitive a make-up that the preacher has to give them special attention to keep them in a good humor. One woman said to me the other day, “Brother Wallace, you never have come to see me.” I said, “Well, if I come around, it will be because I think there is something the matter with you.” People should take it as a compliment when the preacher lets them alone—he things they do not need him. Sometimes people want to sit around and be receiving attention all the time from somebody. That is not the idea in the church. It is not what I can get out of it, it is what I can put into it, what I can be doing, instead of being a problem, or care. Contribute something yourself in interest and in money, and it will cure your complaints against the preacher’s visiting schedule.

I find the elders have problems. I really have sympathy for conscientious, qualified elders of a congregation. They have more responsibility, more cares, more obligations, they do more with less reward in the way of praise, than any other group of men in the church. But there is always some preacher or some member of the church picking on some good man who is an elder of a congregation, talking about his boys or his wife, or another member of his family, if not about him. Good elders in a church certainly have their problems and cares, on the other hand, the church may have an elder problem. Maybe he is not qualified, maybe he is not conscientious, maybe he is stubborn, insistent on having his own way, maybe he is self-willed, maybe he is quick-tempered and gets angry. A careless fellow went into a powder mill, where powder magazines were built and stacked up in a pile; and he lighted a match, pitched it over in a pile of powder, and it burned up a lot of valuable stuff before they could put it out. You know a lot of times one man can set more on fire in a few words than all the rest of us can put out in years. Take a man who is a preacher, leader or an elder in the church, who can’t be reasoned with, who has his own ideas about
things, is self-willed, contentious, well, he is a problem. Some elders become problems, which congregations have to face in many instances.

THE "YOUNG PEOPLE" PROBLEM

In recent years everywhere I go, I hear about a young people's problem, but I have never felt that we had a young people's problem at all. I think it is somewhere else. I know in nearly every congregation where I have stayed any length of time, somebody who doesn't know too much about it, becomes suddenly concerned about our young people, and they begin to plan and they begin to talk and they begin to agitate, that something must be done for our young people; and they finally manage to stir up something to be done for our young people that the young people themselves never did think of and never did want, and won't support by their attendance when the thing is started. Well, what about young people? They are members of the church. What about them, don't they need training? Certainly they need training; they need the kind of Christian education that the church offers, and anything, whether it is a meeting, regular or otherwise for them, or for them and somebody else, that will contribute to their increased knowledge and their increase of ability to work, is well and good. But to create in a church a young people's consciousness, that something special has to be done for them; and if we are going to hold the young people we must do this, and we must do that, is nothing in the world but just pure bunk. You know I have resented it on behalf of the young people, and I think they have resented too, being made the goat for somebody else's subversive schemes. Way back yonder when somebody wanted to put an organ in the church, wanted to have societies, and wanted to imitate and ape everything that the sectarian did, they made the young people the goat, used them for an excuse, and said: "We've got to have an organ to hold the young people." Well that wasn't so; it wasn't the young people who were crying for it, unless somebody else had put them up to it, and they never would have thought about it. Now our sectarian neighbors have got this, and they've got that, and if we hold our young people, we must have something like it. I've got enough confidence in the integrity and the honesty and the good sense of my young people to believe that it doesn't take anything but the gospel and its spiritual program to hold them. You know, the gospel won't hold some people. There is something wrong with people when you've got to offer something besides the gospel to get them, keep offering them something besides the gospel to keep them. The church may fail to give its young people the spiritual help they need, and seeing their young people losing interest in church activities, determine to provide a social or recreational program that is planned to attract and hold young people. Picture shows, parties, ball teams, banquets and numerous other devices may be used. These activities may all be good in their place, for Christian parents who feel responsible for the recreation of their children, but they have no place in the program or work of the church. In other words, a lot of parents want to turn their responsibilities over to the church.

Now, you know, we have raised a good many children at our house. Brother W. A. Schultz went out into the country for dinner over in Arkansas; looked around and saw the yard full of children, and he said to the woman, "Sister, how many children have you got anyhow?" She said, "Eleven." He said, "Well, that's better than having so many ain't it?" We haven't had quite that many, but we have a pretty good bunch of children at my house, and I've never felt it the duty of the church to provide recreation for them. If I did, I wouldn't confess it. I've never felt that I had to turn them over to the church to he entertained. I have a responsibility as a parent, and you have a responsibility as a parent. They are activities that pertain to the home, and you can't turn your children over to the church, or anybody else, to furnish the entertainment and things like that, that they need.

The church has its mission to perform, and has its teaching to do, but a man, even in his youth, has spiritual needs. The church is uniquely designed to satisfy these special needs. If the church does not have a program, a worship and service program, a spiritual program, that satisfies its youth, let it never deceive itself in thinking it can hold them with entertainment and pleasure. You know that spiritual service consists in preaching and worship and work, but the church cannot compete with other organizations of a community on a social entertainment basis. Modern youth is starved spiritually. That hunger will not be satisfied with socials, camping trips, or athletic activities, as wholesome as all these things are in their proper place; the church must give the bread of life, and when it does it will draw young and old. Now that is so.

Take our young people's meetings. Well, they are creating a class consciousness, you know, that idea of doing something for "our young people" as a special class in the church. In sectarian churches they have a young people's church-the junior church-they have their own organization, their own elders, and when they get through with their work, they go home or somewhere else.

Young peoples consciousness—we don't need that in the church. There is one of our problems, and it is a problem that has arisen because of a false emphasis. You know, a lot of church
troubles over the country come from young peoples' meetings and women's meetings. I want to be understood here; I would not discourage a young peoples' meeting for any proper purpose, or a women's meeting for any proper purpose, but I wonder, get to thinking about it sometimes, people come to meeting on Sunday morning about ten o'clock, and stay there until twelve, in Bible classes, preaching and worship, and then they are asked to come back again in the evening, and spend another hour or hour and a half in Bible classes, which is “the Sunday School all over again,” as one expressed preliminary to the evening preaching. Well, about four hours of it in all and I wonder if it is practical. Some good things can be overdone.

THE WOMEN'S PROBLEMS

Then there is the problem of women's meetings. They meet to study the Bible, that's fine. And it may be that there is some work among the poor, and it may be that they will do some sewing, making clothes, quilts and things of that sort to be distributed among the poor, and that's fine. But, you know, women everywhere are not like they are here. Somewhere there will be a women's meeting that doesn't have much oversight, it is not watched, and there will be one or two women of the kind they ought not to be who start talking, and they will pick the elders to pieces, and somebody else to pieces, and the first thing you know it turns into a gossip session. A lot of dissatisfaction is stirred up in the church. I can give you a case in point, but had better not call any names in this connection. I went to a place to preach, moved there, in fact it is where I am now. A man and his wife came there, good people, and she was a delightful little woman, and looked all right, but she talked! The fact is she talked, talked, talked. She had come from some wild place in California with wild ideas, and she felt like we ought to do things just exactly like they do them out there. She went to the elders, and she'd tell them, they ought to do this, and she thought they ought to do that. Well she came down to see me about the church. "Now, Bro. Wallace, here's what I think the elders ought to do; here's what I think everybody else ought to do." She had the whole thing mapped out, and I listened for about an hour. My wife sat there and she talked and talked, and finally she ‘turned to me' and said, "Bro. Wallace, what do you think about that?" I said, "All right, you’ve asked me what I think, and I'm going to tell you. The first thing I think is that you talk too much. And it isn't your business to come here and run this church. The elders of this church were here long before you came and my advice to you is to keep quiet and let them run this church like it was intended they do. You may give them whatever womanly counsel you can in a womanly way; that will be fine; but you are out of your place." Well, the Sister blew up and said, "I'll never speak to you again."

There are some things that need to be said, and have to be said when somebody starts talking too much, or somebody goes acting out of turn, and it is one of those problems that come up all along in the work of the church. I am going to leave until tomorrow evening, a few definite things that I want to say about a few more problems on some fundamental issues. The preachers should be learning what the gospel is, and learn what the Lord's plan is, and bear down and bear down hard on fundamentals, keeping before the people the demands of God, and the loyalty that ought to always move human hearts in obeying the will of the Lord.
It is just as essential to be right religiously as it is to be religious. This proposition must be approved by common sense. And it certainly must be accepted as true by every man who believes the Bible is what it claims to be, the authoritative word of God. There runs through the Bible the story of the conflict between genuine, divinely approved religion and counterfeit, humanly approved religion.

When God placed man in the garden of Eden he spoke to him. He told him what he wanted him to do. He also issued one prohibition. He forbade his eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God thus placed before Adam a reminder that he was under authority. He must let that fruit alone because, and only because God said, "Of it thou mayest not eat." Thus the principle was established in the very beginning that when God speaks, man must hear; when God commands, man must obey.

"And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto Jehovah. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And Jehovah had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." (Genesis 4:3-5).

God is no respecter of persons, but he respects character and conduct and respect for his authority. We are very plainly told in the New Testament that Abel's offering was "more excellent" than Cain's and why. It is all summed up in two words . . . . "by faith." "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect to his gifts: and through it he being dead yet speaketh." (Hebrews 11:4). Cain and Abel were both believers in God. In that sense they both had faith. They were both religious. They both offered sacrifice to God. What was the difference? By faith Abel offered by faith his offering. It was how he obeyed God and without hope in the world. Cain substituted human reason for divine revelation. But he was still religious. Paul said to idolaters at Athens, "I perceive ye are very religious" (Acts 17:22). They had Gods many and lords many. They worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator. They had the wrong kind of religion and were without God and without hope in the world (Ephesians 2:11, 12).

Let us look more closely at the significance of this little phrase, "by faith." "By faith Noah prepared an ark" (Heb. 11:7). It so happens we have a very clear exposition of the meaning of this sentence in the account in Genesis of Noah's building the ark. God commanded him to build the ark. Without this command he could not have built it "by faith." He was commanded to build it of gopher wood. He could not have used any other material "by faith" (Gen. 6:14). God also said, "This is how thou shalt build it." (Gen. 6:15). "Plans and specifications" were given. Now Paul says Noah prepared the ark "by faith." But Moses has told us, "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he." (Gen. 6:22). In this case "by faith" includes complete obedience, and nothing else. The same thought appears in Heb. 11:8, "By faith" Abraham obeyed.

After mankind had gone into idolatry, God called Abraham to be the head of a chosen race. The mission of this race was to preserve the knowledge of the true God in the world and to maintain true religion. It was in response to this call that Abraham "obeyed by faith" to go where Jehovah directed him to go. When God promised Abraham that he would make of him a great nation, Abraham, in spite of apparently insurmountable natural obstacles, believed God. In fulfillment of the promise Isaac was born. "And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him, Take now thy son . . . Isaac . . . and offer him for a burnt offering." (Gen. 22:1, 2). Abraham was in the act of carrying out the command when the angel of the Lord called upon him.
and said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, for now I know that thou fearest God (Gen. 22:11, 12). “And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith Jehovah, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen. 22:15-18). Have you thought this great gospel promise (Gal. 3:8) was unconditional? If you would like further proof that it was conditional, read what God said to Isaac. “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Gen. 26:4, 5).

“By faith Abraham offered up Isaac” (Heb. 11:17). He did it only because God commanded him to do it. Do you think he could have sacrificed Isaac “by faith” if God had not commanded him to offer his son? “Thou believest that God is one; thou dost well: the demons also believe, and shudder. But wilt thou know, 0 vain man, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? Thou seest that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect; and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God. Ye see that by works a man is justified and not only by faith.” (James 2:19-24).

We come to God by faith. He that cometh to God must believe that God is and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him. Without faith it is impossible to please him. But, “that which Israel seeketh for, that he obtained not” (Rom. 11:7). “But Israel, following after a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Wherefore (why)? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by works.” (Rom. 9:30-33). . . . they rejected Christ, they did not obey the gospel (Rom. 10:16); they did not submit to the righteousness of God, but sought to establish their own (Rom. 10:3), and were lost. Believing in God (Heb. 11:6) is one thing. Coming to God is another thing. But we must come in order to have life (John 5:40). We come by doing every thing the gospel requires as conditions of salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:8-10).

After we come to God for salvation, we must “walk by faith” (2 Cor. 5:7). “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not found, for God translated him: for he hath witness borne to him that before his translation he had been well pleasing unto God” (Heb. 11:5). The testimony borne to him is this: “Enoch walked with God three hundred years; . . . and he was not; for God took him” (Gen. 5:21-24).

Fortunately we have a clear and full discussion of our subject by Christ himself. The people “were astonished at his teaching because he taught as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt. 7:28, 29). But the discussion to which I refer is recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Matthew and the seventh chapter of Mark. “And there are gathered together unto him the Pharisees and certain of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of his disciples ate their bread with defiled hands. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands diligently—(or, up to the elbow, margin, Revised Version)—eat not, holding the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the market-place, except they bathe themselves, they eat not; and many other things there are, which they have received to hold, washing of cups, and pots, and brasen vessels). And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with defiled hands? (Mark 7:1-5). His answer, “Why do ye also transgress the commandments of God because of your tradition? For God said, Honor thy father and thy mother. . . . But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, That wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is given to God: he shall not honor his father (or his mother). And ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition” (Matt. 15:6-13).

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It will greatly assist us in understanding the full force of what is recorded in these passages to have some knowledge of the history and meaning of Jewish tradition. Ages after the time of Moses the tradition arose that when Moses received the law at Mt. Sinai, God also gave him an oral law. This was handed down, so it was contended, from generation to generation by word of mouth. This unwritten law began to be written down at about the time of Christ. Later, “comments, opinions and disputations” upon it were written. The oral law was called the Mishna. The commentary was called the Gemara. The two constitute the Talmud. Jesus referred to it as “the precepts of men” in sharp contrast to the word and commandment of God.

The report of our Lord’s miracles seems to
have given great uneasiness to the scribes and Pharisees at Jerusalem; and some of them had come in order to watch his conduct, and to seek for matter of accusation against him. But not finding that he, or his disciples, neglected any part of the divine law, they objected to his disregard of “the tradition of the elders.” It was pretended by them, and still is by modern Jews, that these traditions were originally received from God by immediate revelation, and were of equal authority with the written law; and that they had been delivered down, by word of mouth, from one to another, through successive generations. Thus the scribes, who were the supposed repositories, and interpreters of them, had the power of altering them, and imposing them on the people, according to their conveniences in the same manner as the church of Rome long maintained its usurped authority, by dictating to the whole Western church under similar pretensions; and as it still maintains that usurpation through many populous regions.” Whosoever despiseth the washing of hands, is worthy to be excommunicated, he comes to poverty, and he will be extinguished out of the world. He that eats bread with unwashen hands, does as bad as if he committed whoredom. R. Aquiba, being in prison, and not having enough water to drink, and to wash his hands, chose to do the latter, saying, “It was better to die with thirst than transgress the traditions of the elders ... The religions of old did eat their common food in cleanness ... and they were called Pharisees. And this is a matter of the highest sanctity, and the way of the highest religion, that a man separate himself, and go aside from the vulgar; and that he neither touch them, nor eat or drink with them: for such conduct doth to the purity of the body from evil works, the purity of the body conduceth to the cleansing of the soul from evil affections, and the sanctity of the soul conduceth to the likeness of God ... Whosoever hath his seat in the land of Israel, and saith his common food with cleanness, and speaks the holy language, and recites his phylacteries morning and evening: let him be confident that he shall obtain the life of the world to come.” Jewish writers, quoted by Whitby.

All additions to the laws of God are an infringement of his legislative authority; and a presumptuous imputation on his wisdom, as if he had omitted something necessary which man could supply: and, in one way or the other, they always clash with the divine precepts: so that an attachment to human traditions necessarily leads men, in some circumstances, or in some respects, to disobey God; and it is evident that our Lord had expressly taught his disciples to disregard them. Doubtless they, at this time, observed the ceremonial distinction of meats, and other divine appointments. Jesus therefore answered the scribes by asking them, “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your traditions?” — The words of the scribes are lovely, above the words of the law, and more weighty than the words of the law or the prophets.” Quotation in Whitby. — Our Lord then selected one instance, in proof of this charge. The law, delivered from Mt. Sinai, and written on the tables of stone by God himself, contained this command: “Honor thy father and thy mother.” (By honor is meant all kind of duty which children owe to their parents.) Beza. (Note, Ex. 20:12) And in the judicial law, he had commanded, that “he who cursed father or mother, should be put to death.” (Marg. Ref. g. h.) Now it must be as wicked to do evil to parents, or to withhold the good due to them, as to wish that evil might Befall them; especially as the latter might be done in a sudden passion, and the former must be deliberate and habitual. Yet the scribes had decided, by their traditions, that in case a son should say to his parents, however aged, poor, and distressed, that he had vowed to the treasury whatever he could spare, and by which he might have assisted them; and should thus excuse himself from showing respect, gratitude, or kindness to them, leaving them in indigence, whilst he lived in plenty; he must not only not be required, but he ought not to be suffered, to do anything for them: it being, probably, expected from him to put money from time to time into the treasury, (of which the scribes and priests had the charge,) by way of compensation for his omission. Thus, from a vain pretense, they directly repealed God’s law, and rendered it of ‘none effect by their traditions:” and, as this was only one instance out of very many, their traditions must be disregarded and opposed, in order that the law of God might be honored and obeyed. — If a man can answer his parents, when they need any relief, and tell them, I have bound myself with an oath, that I will not do anything to the relief of my father or mother: or, as some understand it, 0 father, that by which thou shouldst be relieved by me, is a gift already devoted to God, and cannot without impiety be otherwise employed; and by this piety to God I may be profitable ... to thee; for God will repay it to me and thee in our needs: he is under obligation not to give it to his father ... A father, being in want, requires relief from his son: the son answers, that he hath vowed he will not; so that to him it remains not lawful to relieve him; and the Pharisees approve of this practice; that he may thus evacuate his duty to his parent: and though quite contrary to the precept of honoring and relieving them, yet it was by them thought obligatory to the frustrating of that- command-
ment. And many cases are set down, wherein it doth so, in Maimonides and the Rabbins.’ Hammond. — The pretence of devoting to God the property thus withheld from the parent, as the occasion of the oath seems implied. — ‘A man may be so bound by them,’ that is by vows, ‘that he cannot, without great sin, do what God by his law required to be done. So that if he made a vow, which laid him under a necessity to violate God’s law that he might observe it, his vow must stand, and the law be abrogated.’ Jewish canon from Pecock. — This specimen is sufficient to lead any reflecting person to conclude, that human traditions and the law of God cannot subsist together; but the prevalence of the former must inevitably lead to make void the latter; and this consideration shows the reason of our Lord’s most decided opposition to that system of tradition. — Scott’s Bible Notes and Practical Observations.

From the viewpoint of these Pharisees and scribes, it was no trivial question they asked. It was a crucial one. They were putting Jesus on the spot as to his attitude toward the whole body of their tradition. They selected the washing of hands as an example. It was washing of hands, not in the ordinary sense, but as a religious rite to remove ceremonial, legal defilement. They did not ask why his disciples transgressed the commandment of God in the law, but why they transgressed the tradition of the elders. They taught however that these traditions had all the force of divine commands. The reply of Christ was an uncompromising condemnation of tradition as making void the word of God, as a rejection of the commandment of God. They not only required what God had not commanded; but freed men from obligations to what he had commanded.

What command of God did they reject in requiring the washing of hands? Had God said, ‘Thou shalt not wash your hands before you eat?’ No. But he had said, ‘What thing soever I command you, that shall ye observe to do: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.’” Deut. 12:32. Christ teaches in these passages that there is a conflict between God’s word and man’s traditions. You can not be governed by both. He said, quoting Isaiah, “But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men” (Matt. 15:9).

The Jews did what has been done repeatedly by professed followers of Christ: they introduced practices which were not authorized by the word of God. They became fixed customs. Then years or centuries later they began to contend that these practices were authorized by the word of God all the time. Men do not like to admit that their religious practices are without divine authority.

It has been called to your attention that the washing of hands had not been forbidden. But that did not authorize it. God could not very well authorize a practice by saying nothing about it, by his silence. It should also be observed that the washing of hands was, in itself, an entirely harmless, innocent act. But when men made a religious rite out of it, Christ condemned the practice and refused to submit to the man made law. Yet two of the most popular arguments today in defense of unauthorized religious practices are these:

1. “It is not forbidden. The Bible does not say not to do it.”
2. “There is no harm in it. It is an innocent act.”

Those who make these arguments certainly have learned nothing from the fierce conflict between Christ and the scribes and Pharisees. What harm was there in the washings (baptisings in the Greek) of cups and pots and brazen vessels or in the taking of a bath? (Mark 7:4)
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