

## DOCTRINAL POSITION

Because of the importance of this subject the following is being reprinted verbatim from the July, 2003 Newsletter of The Church of God, Volume 5, Issue 2. This information represents a basic belief of T-COG.

Quoting from the Newsletter:

The letter reprinted here was written to me on April 24, 2003 by one of the TCOG brethren. My response to the writer follows the letter. The only change made here to the original letter is the deletion of some personal remarks made to myself and my family.  
DLR

Re: Doctrinal Position

Dear Don,

I believe that you have adopted and are propounding a doctrinal position that I have not before heard within WCG, PCG or among the outcasts. Verbal communication is however limited in that the hearer does not always hear what the speaker has spoken in the way that the speaker intended it. For this reason I wanted to express to you what I believe you are advocating to be certain that I understand you. Then I wish to express my concerns over what I believe are inaccuracies in what you have been saying. If I have correctly understood you, then you will at least have some feedback on how your position is being perceived.

The doctrinal matter centers about the meaning of:

**Matthew 23:33** “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

And the related scripture:

**2 Corinthians 3:6** “Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

My perception is that you are taking the position that “justice, mercy, and faith” are matters that are entirely codified within the written law rather than primary parts of the law that are mostly separate from the written law.

Your recent sermons and Bible studies have appeared to say that all applications of mercy are defined within the written law, and that faith as a part of the law is limited to having faith in the workability of following the law as explicitly laid down in writing or specially instructed by God. If that is indeed a fair characterization of your position, then I

must ask you to try to explain how that is any different from the Scribes and Pharisees and modern Judaism (which is essentially Pharisaic Judaism). For millennia the

Rabbis have been digging through the scriptures and finding this or that bit of written law and claiming that it applies to some particular case, and it has gotten them nowhere.

Allow me to give some examples of how I have arrived at this view of your position.

1. Your sermon on the 7<sup>th</sup> Day of Unleavened Bread dealt with faith and the law. You went to great lengths to give examples of where people such as Abraham had faith and did as God had instructed them. That is good and accurate as far as it goes, but it leaped out at me, when you were quoting from James 2 about the works of obedience that Abraham performed, that you jumped right over James 2:25.

**James 2:25 “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?”**

Now it is doubtful that this Canaanite harlot Rahab was one who knew and kept the Law of the God of Abraham. What works was James referring to? Rahab’s own words were:

**Joshua 2:9 “And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.**

**10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan. Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.”**

Clearly this was a woman who saw that the God of Abraham was the true God and she was cutting a deal with these Israelite spies. Yes she did later become part of the lineage of Christ, but at the time of her works mentioned in James 2, she was a whore, liar, and part of the corrupt Canaanite culture.

2. As another example, in your recent comments about the application of mercy in the law, you took apart the story about the woman taken in adultery (John 8:4) and tried to make the claim that Christ was simply following the law with respect to “entrapment”. But entrapment is a term from man’s law not defined in the Bible! If Christ had followed the letter of the law, He would have joined the crowd in stoning the woman after a proper trial as in the Old Testament examples in:

**Leviticus 24:14 “Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him.”**

**Leviticus 24:16** “And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger; as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall he be put to death.”

**Numbers 15:35** “And the LORD said to Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.”

**Deuteronomy 21:21** “And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.”

In these scriptures it is explicit that **ALL** were required to do the stoning, and other scriptures appear to have this implicitly. Jewish practice was that a witness who testified had to cast the first stone, but Christ scattered them with His famous statement in John 8:7 “...**He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,**” plus whatever He wrote in the dust. The whole of His actions was an act of outright mercy rather than seeking to enforce the letter of the law.

3. An additional example in which you tried to make the case had to do with whether it was actually lawful for David and his men to eat the showbread, and you produced reasons that were used by the priest when he gave them the bread but you skipped the explicit words of Christ in:

**Matthew 12:4** “How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the showbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?”

Christ Himself flat out said it was unlawful, and so it was! It violated the letter of the law! However as a matter of mercy Ahimalech the priest went beyond the letter of the law, and as long as the men met certain ameliorating circumstances the priest allowed it. Nevertheless that use of the bread was clearly unlawful by the letter of the law.

Although I do not have your exact words to quote, at the conference this spring I understood you to say that all that we needed to make decisions was in the law because it was profoundly deep and covered all situations.

I simply find no basis for the position that all aspects of the weightier matters of Justice/Judgment, Mercy and Faith are encompassed by the written law. Christ’s own words expressed in Matthew 23:23 plus Paul’s assertion in 2 Corinthians 3:6 have these concepts as a counterbalance to the written letter of the law. I would hope that your position is not as I have perceived it, but I believe that I have understood both your statements and intent. I am willing to be persuaded to your position or any other that can be shown to be scriptural, but I do not see how your position, as I perceive it, is tenable in

view of the scriptures and points I have noted above. I also believe that I could find more points like the one I have cited but for the sake of brevity I think they suffice for now.

I would like to invite you to consider certain actions. If the perception of your position is grossly inaccurate, I would ask that you set the record straight. If the perception of your position is for the most part accurate, I would ask that you explain in validity and address the above points and others that will surely be raised.

In Christian Love,

My reply July 17, 2003

Thank you for your letter and comments regarding my position on God's law. Matthew 23:23 will be addressed as we look at the scriptures you have mentioned in your letter.

First, let's consider 2 Corinthians 3:6, so as to get the correct sense of it. "Not the letter, but the spirit." As New Testament ministers we are to teach that one must not hate his brother, which is tantamount to killing him. Matthew 5:21-24, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder,' and whosoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

This is the spiritual way of teaching. "For the letter killeth." If one thinks that he needs to restrain himself from the physical act alone he has missed a major point in Christ's teaching. Our thoughts belie our true character. Hared is the reflection of one's true intent. The one hating may very well be held in check due to his realization of the consequences for carrying out the act. Therefore this act of hatred is sin though the physical act was never carried out.

The opposite of this is that if we understand the spiritual aspect of this law, and so teach that it is wrong to hate our brother, let alone kill him, then this spiritual understanding will lead to eternal life. It is the hatred that is the fundamental wrong.

Without going into a detailed explanation of repentance and forgiveness it is impossible to claim that person is spiritual, and yet commits murder, steals, commits adultery, or bears false witness. In breaking the letter of the law the spirit of the law is also broken. Therefore one must conclude that being spiritual requires keeping the letter of the law before one can go on to its spiritual fulfillment. Or, more accurately put, when one grasps the spiritual

intent of the law and lives by it, it then becomes impossible for him to break the letter of the law. This is why Paul says that teaching the spirit of the law brings eternal life.

Your statement that I believe justice, mercy, and faith are codified within the written law is incorrect. (Codified taken to mean an exact situation is covered by an exact written explanation). First one must add judgment to justice, mercy, and faith in order to reflect what should be believed on this subject.

In way of explanation Deuteronomy 24:6 states, "No man shall take the lower or upper millstone in pledge, for he takes one's living in pledge." If this scripture is taken literally it would have no application today, seeing that millstones are no longer in use. If we have judgment we see past the letter to the principal. We cannot take away from a man the tools by which he earns his living. This principal of God's law shows justice in that the lender is forewarned that he cannot take the poor man's tools in payment of a loan. It shows mercy to the poor man by allowing him to continue to earn a living and ultimately clearing up the debt. Faith results when we see that God's laws really work.

Consider also what Mr. Herbert Armstrong taught about smoking. Mr. Armstrong did not just say that smoking is distasteful and unpleasant. He said that smoking IS SIN. Mr. Armstrong did not find an explicit

scripture that states "smoking is sin." But he used the spiritual principles of God's law to come to his judgment. He noted that God's LAW teaches that we are not to defile the body. The lungs are to help keep the blood pure – smoking goes contrary to the system God has set up. Next, Mr. Armstrong noted that smoking does not show love to one's neighbor – and so breaks the LAW in this regard too. So, based upon God's LAW, smoking is SIN.

All I am trying to say, and perhaps I have been misunderstood, is that ministers (and brethren) cannot just pluck judgments "out of the air." We will always be able to find that God's Word covers all situations, in principle, somewhere --- and we need to ensure we thoroughly examine the laws of God in coming to our conclusions. This is where understanding the underlying spirit of God's law is so important.

James says that Rahab was justified by works. Let's see if this justification had anything to do with God's law. What was the basis for Rahab's actions? Joshua 2:9-10, "And (she) said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are faint hearted because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed."

Rahab mirrors perfectly the calling and conversion of a present day convert to God's way of life. First by hearing of the great events listed above (not an eye-witness to them.) She understood that God is God and there is none other; the first commandment of the law.

Today we read about the same events she heard about, which amounts to the same thing; the realization that the True God was the God of Israel.

As you pointed out, she had a very sordid background, just as many today have had. She acted on her belief in the first commandment. Her faith was based on partial knowledge, just as many of us today only had partial understanding of God's way of life when we were first called. Simply put, if she believed the God of Israel is God, she wanted to get in line with His will. His will was to give the land to the Israelites, and she cooperated in this effort.

Next you bring up John 8:4, saying that if Christ had followed the law He would have stoned the woman. If Christ had stoned the woman He would have **BROKEN THE LAW**. Numbers 35:30, "Whoever kills a person, the murdered shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses, but one witness is not sufficient testimony against the person for the death penalty." In Deuteronomy 17:6 it says, "Whoever is worthy of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses, but he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness." Both of these scriptures require more than one witness for the death penalty. In John 8:10 Christ asks, "Where are thy accusers (witnesses)?" None were there, so then the law requires that she cannot be condemned.

You say, "Entrapment is a term from man's law, not defined in the bible." Entrapment is definitely spelled out in the law. Leviticus 19:14, "You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the Lord." One might say that this applies only to blind or deaf people. No. This principal applies to all people. Romans 14:13, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not putting a stumbling block, or a cause to fall in our brother's way."

Your citing of Leviticus 24:14,16, Numbers 15:35, and Deuteronomy 21:21 is correct as far as the punishment is concerned. But without witnesses no punishment can be meted out. This reflects a physical kind of thinking by not using the whole law which also encompasses justice and mercy.

We read in John 8:7, "So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to the, 'He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first,'" Christ takes this directly from the law. Deuteronomy 17:7, "The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hands of the people. So you shall put away the evil person from among you." The witnesses were causal in this sin. (Entrapment.) They were out for vengeance, and their guilt was made plain by Christ. They were no longer credible witnesses. They left! The result? No witnesses, period! No witnesses, no stoning.

Your observation of what Christ said in Matthew 12:4 would give an incorrect interpretation to what He was saying if you stop at the end of this verse; but when you read the next verse you will understand that what is given in verse 4 is a parallel example to verse 5. Under normal circumstances both would be sin (eating the showbread or working on the Sabbath.) The working on the Sabbath by the priests was understood by the

Pharisees as necessary. So it was easy for them to see that it was no sin. What they failed to understand was that the showbread command was negated under a special circumstance of serving those traveling. Leviticus 25:35, “If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or sojourner that he may live with you.” The priest was required to provide food for the traveler. The only food he had was the showbread, so following God’s law, he gave it to David. This parallel is obvious. Here Christ was trying to show the Pharisees the spiritual intent of the law, which is the love of neighbor as self.

Leviticus 25:35 shows that this principal was imbedded in the law.

What I absolutely believe is that one cannot make something sin that is not sin. I.E. walking more than a prescribed distance on the Sabbath, or the picking and eating of grain to feed oneself on the Sabbath. These men were hypocrites in making this accusation of sin, when they themselves were sinning by not carrying out the law requiring them to care for the stranger and traveler in their lands. Leviticus 25:35. On the other hand, they were making sin a non-sin. Mark 7:6-9, “He answered and said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written; this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. FOR LAYING ASKIDE THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD, you hold the tradition of men – the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.’ And He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your tradition.’”

As Mr. Armstrong pointed out many times, “*Sin is the transgression of the law.*” When we teach God’s law and its spiritual application, we bring to those being taught the potential of eternal life.

Matthew 23:23 states, “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These ought you to have done, without leaving the others undone.” Here Christ is making a comparison between the paying of tithes of mint, anise and cumin with that of justice, mercy and faith. The Pharisees made a big thing out of these minor items; but Christ said the overlooked important parts of the law; such as justice, faith and mercy. There is no reference made here to the rest of God’s law. These three items are not, nor could ever be more important than what Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-40. “Jesus said to him, ‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love our neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’”

It is plain that these three items are part of the law, not a counterbalance to it. Matthew 23:23 is showing a comparison between a minor act of paying tithes on minor items. Taking the time to laboriously count out these tiny seeds and to tithe on them is not anywhere as important as justice, mercy and faith, which is also part of the law. In verse 24

Christ makes plain this very understanding, “Blind guides who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel!”

Finally, it has always been the understanding, taught by Mr. Armstrong through the WCG during his lifetime, that God’s work is the instruction book on how to produce righteous character, and how the Body of Christ is to conduct itself. As has already been stated in Matthew 22:37-40 we can see what the primary directive is. This if further understood and expanded upon in the keeping of the ten commandments, which in turn is still further expanded in the directions given to us in the statues and judgments., (The books of the law.)

God tells us in Deuteronomy 4:2, 4 and 5, “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.” Verses 4 & 5, “But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you. Surely I have taught you statues and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess.” Deuteronomy 12:32 echoes the same thought.

The servant of the Eternal God gave these instructions to Joshua after the death of Moses. Joshua 1:7-9. “Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses, my servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it., For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Hine I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

It is quite clear that if we want God with us, we had better be looking to and following His instructions to us in the books of the law. This is exactly what Christ did in dealing with the woman taken in adultery, and we are to do as He did.

Hopefully this will clear up some misunderstanding which you may have thought I had about these scriptures.

Sincerely,

Don Roth

NOTE: NKJ USED THROUGHOUT