

# REMINDER

Volume XVI

April 18, 2010

Number 16



*The Late*  
**Dr. Ron Dunn**

## *How To Interpret The Bible, Part 8*

by the late Evangelist Ron Dunn

*T*here are six rules of Bible interpretation. Thusfar, we've looked at the first three:

- ☛ ***RULE #1 - The Bible as the Word of God is our sole guide and authority for faith and practice.***
- ☛ ***RULE #2 - The Primary Theme of Revelation Is Redemption.***
- ☛ ***RULE #3 - The Revelation of God Is a Progressive Revelation.***

We're now looking at -

### ***RULE #4 - We Must Distinguish Between The Picture And The Frame***

One of Augustine's famous sayings was this...  
***"Distinguish the times and you will harmonize Scripture."***

So, our first task in interpreting a passage of Scripture is to discover what it meant to the original readers. We cannot know what it means to us until we know what it meant to them! That is a very important statement. We cannot know what the Bible means to us until first of all we know what it meant to the original readers. Unless we recognize that there are cultural and historical and geographical positions that separate us from the text being studied, we will overlook the differences, you see, and we'll find ourselves in great confusion.

If we're not careful, we will read their words but with our definitions. Now, for instance, let me illustrate it like this. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church in I Corinthians 8 concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols. It was a big issue back in those days because here is a man or a woman or a family who goes down to a pagan temple to worship a pagan god and they take with them an animal to sacrifice. So, they sacrifice that animal on the altar of that pagan god. Now, afterwards the priests, the pagan priests would take the remainder of that animal that had been sacrificed and they would sell it in the marketplace...and so, it became a hotly debated issue in Paul's day of whether it was right for a Christian to eat meat that had been offered to idols. So, when you went to the marketplace to buy a slab of meat, you would say, "I want to know first of all...was this meat offered to idols?" And if it was, then there were those who said, "Oh, you can't eat meat offered to idols." There were other Christians who

said, "Oh, it doesn't matter. An idol is not anything...it doesn't matter whether it was offered to an idol or anything..."

So, this was a great controversy. And in Paul's day, it was a big deal among Christians. Now, I must admit to you that I have no problem with that. I can't remember the last time the subject came up. When I go the supermarket I almost never ask the butcher if the hamburger was offered to idols first of all. No, and you don't either. See, the historical situation has no relevance in our day. That is no argument today. It has absolutely no relevance today. It was simply the frame into which was placed a picture of a lasting truth and an eternal relevant principle.

Do you know what Paul's conclusion was? What Paul basically said was that there's not anything wrong with eating meat sacrificed to idols because an idol is nothing, so it doesn't matter...it's not anything wrong with it. But, he said and here's the principle... "If eating meat offends my brother or causes my brother to sin, I will eat no meat as long as the world stands." Here is the issue of meat being offered to idols and should that meat be eaten by Christians. Now, that's the frame, folks. The picture is you don't do anything that makes yourself a stumbling block to weaker Christians. That's the picture. That's the eternal truth. That's the lasting truth...set down, fitted into the frame of a certain historical, cultural situation.

I remember a few years ago at the Keswick Convention, a woman asked me if I thought we ought to obey the Bible. Now, when somebody comes up and says, "Do you think we ought to

*(continued inside)*

obey the Bible?" there's only one answer to that question, of course... "Yes, we ought to obey the Bible." And I said, "Yes, we ought to obey the Bible." Then, she said, "Okay, if we ought to obey the Bible why don't we greet the brethren with a holy kiss like the Bible says?"

Well, I assumed she was referring to one of Paul's statements or Peter's like in Romans 16 or I Peter 5, where we're told to greet one another with a holy kiss. That's what she was referring to. And so I said to her, "Well, in the first place, the emphasis in those words is on 'holy' not 'kiss.' And in the second place, greeting one another with a kiss was the customary greeting in that day...in that culture...it still is." As a matter of fact, just a few days before that I'd seen on television Arafat greeting the president of Jordan by kissing him on both cheeks and on the nose...I'd never seen that before. And so when Paul and Peter were telling their readers to greet one another with a holy kiss, they weren't telling one another to greet one another with a kiss...they were already doing that...they were to make sure that it was a holy kiss, you see. By the way, you know the difference between a holy kiss and an unholy kiss? About two minutes!

Anyway, Paul was not telling them to greet one another with a kiss, because they were already doing that. They were to make sure that it was a holy kiss. "The gesture of kissing," I said to the woman, "was the same as a handshake for us. If Paul were writing these words to us he would say something like this... 'greet one another with a holy handshake.'" The frame is the act of kissing. The picture is a holy kiss. And according to I Peter 5... "kiss of charity"...not just "a kiss" (greeting) but "a kiss of charity" (God's kind of love).

Now, I think because it is receiving so much attention nowadays that I will mention one other example of this "frame versus picture" principle. And this has to do with the matter of lifting up hands in praise and worship. In some places this is a controversy. Some people say that we ought to do it and others say that we ought not to do it. Some say that we're not really worshipping God unless you're raising your hands in worship and so...let's deal with that for just a moment.

What was once practiced almost exclusively in Pentecostal churches has now become a common and popular expression in many evangelical churches and for many it is a wonderful way to express their praise to God. For some it has become a spiritual status symbol...a sign of liberty and life in public worship. I've heard that some go so far as to say that we do not truly worship God without it. And those who don't raise their hands, at the most sin against God and at the least do not really and truly praise Him. Churches that don't practice this are often accused of being dead and dry and stuffy, bound by the shackles of denominational tradition and have not yet learned how to worship.

I have a friend who was a guest speaker at a local church and during the song service he was standing next to the pastor and the pastor, like most of the people present, had his hands raised up in worship. And the pastor said to my friend, "You know, you're free to raise your hands in this church." And my friend said, "Am I free not to raise my hands?" That was a good question.

Now, lifting up the hands was customary of Jewish worship. It was one of the three postures of prayer...kneeling, lying prostrate and standing with the hands lifted toward heaven...those were the three common positions of prayer. Being a part of their culture, it is mentioned often in the Old Testament...especially in the Psalms. Now, remember the third guideline of interpretation? What does the New Testament say? It's not enough to go back to the Old Testament and find it there...what does the New Testament say about this? Are we, as New Testament believers, commanded to raise our hands in worship and praise? The only passage that comes close to it is I Timothy 2:8 where Paul says, "***I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting***". Now, here again the emphasis is upon "holy", not the lifting up of hands.

Always in New Testament worship the central concern is not the mechanics or the motions of the body but it is the attitude of the heart. Paul was primarily concerned that their prayers were offered in holiness and without anger and quarreling. As I mentioned earlier, lifting up the hands was and still is a regular posture of prayer...Paul was speaking of the language of the custom and culture. If he were writing to us today, he might just as well say, "Kneeling on holy knees..." Lifting up the hands is the frame...holy prayer without wrath and dissension is the picture.

Now, I think it's worthwhile to note that Paul here is referring to prayer, not praise and worship. And more significant are the words "the men". Now, when Paul uses that phrase, he's using the definite article with men, indicating that he is speaking to a specific group and that group is the men as opposed to the women. The word Paul uses here for "men" is the word for "men as opposed to women"...males as contrasted to females. It's not men in the generic sense, when he says, "I would that all men everywhere..." He's not talking about all Christians everywhere...men and women...he's talking about men as opposed to women...males as opposed to females. "The men"... "the males" in the church, you see. And again, it was the custom for the men only to pray aloud in public. Generally the women kept silent. Of course, we don't accept that custom today and we don't have to accept any of the customs today.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm not against raising hands in worship. I think it is wonderful that believers in worship feel the freedom to express their praise to God in that way. I certainly want the right to do it if I so choose. What I am saying is that from the viewpoint of the New Testament the lifting up of hands carries no more spiritual weight than does saying, "amen." It is not the better, the freer or more spiritual way to worship God. Its value resides in what it means to the worshiper only. If it means something to you...if it enables you to worship, by all means do it! But, we should not make it the sign of spiritual freedom in corporate worship. Christians are not commanded to do it. Christians should be free to do it and they should be free not to do it. That's the difference between the picture and the frame.

- more next week

## NEWS OF INTEREST TO CHRISTIANS

by Evangelist David O. Cloud

### ☛ **PETER MASTERS WARNS ABOUT WORLDLY EMERGING CHURCH CALVINISTS** - Dr. Peter Masters,

pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, England, has sounded a warning against the worldliness of American pop-Calvinists such as Mark Driscoll and John Piper. Driscoll calls himself “theologically conservative and culturally liberal” and his Mars Hills Church in Seattle has rock & roll champagne parties, watches R-rated movies, learns how to brew beer, and hosts secular rock concerts. In an article in *The Sword and Trowel*, 2009 No. 1, entitled “*The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness*,” Dr. Masters says: “The new Calvinists constantly extol the Puritans, but they do not want to worship or live as they did. One of the vaunted new conferences is called Resolved, after Jonathan Edwards’ famous youthful Resolutions (seventy searching undertakings). But the culture of this conference would unquestionably have met with the outright condemnation of that great theologian. Resolved is the brainchild of a member of Dr John MacArthur’s pastoral staff, gathering thousands of young people annually, and featuring the usual mix of Calvinism and extreme charismatic-style worship. Young people are encouraged to feel the very same sensational nervous impact of loud rhythmic music on the body that they would experience in a large, worldly pop concert, complete with replicated lighting and atmosphere. At the same time they reflect on predestination and election. Worldly culture provides the bodily, emotional feelings, into which Christian thoughts are infused and floated. Biblical sentiments are harnessed to carnal entertainment. In times of disobedience the Jews of old syncretised by going to the Temple or the synagogue on the sabbath, and to idol temples on weekdays, but the new Calvinism has found a way of uniting spiritually incompatible things at the same time, in the same meeting. ... Truly proclaimed, the sovereignty of God must include consecration, reverence, sincere obedience to his will, and separation from the world.”

**CONCLUDING NOTE FROM BRO. CLOUD:** While we do not agree with Dr. Masters’ sovereign election theology, we could not agree more with his reproof of worldliness and we are thankful for the stand he has taken against the contemporary philosophy. The Bible’s call to not be conformed to the world, to not love the world, and to come out from among them and be separate refutes the ridiculous philosophy of “cultural liberalism” (Romans 12:2; II Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 5:11; James 4:4; I John 2:15-17).

☛ **Churches Reaching Out to the Mystical** - The rise of the Emerging Church movement may not be creating a move toward contemplative mysticism, as much as it is answering a demand that is already there. Churches everywhere are experimenting with mystical practices that have replaced or diminished the gospel message of the finished work of Jesus Christ. This Easter, many churches jumped on a growing bandwagon and participated in the revival of **Tenebrae** services in the days prior to Easter

Sunday. **Tenebrae**, which is Latin for ‘darkness,’ originated in the Roman Catholic Church during the dark ages. It is traditionally a candlelit service, in which all of the candles are extinguished one by one, representing the darkness at the time of the crucifixion. When the room in almost completely dark, participants simulate the crucifixion earthquake by stomping or banging hymnals on the backs of pews. At the end of the service, the darkness remains and participants file out. There are many variations on this basic premise, but the idea is to try to re-create the feelings and the mood surrounding the crucifixion. To experience the despair and hopelessness. However, there is a great gulf between a **Tenebrae** service and the New Testament. There is no example of Christians in the New Testament participating in any sort of practice designed to invoke despair or a dark mood or deep inward reflection. Instead, the believers proclaimed the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ as a hope to a dying world. Despair should be confined to the heart of someone who has never been born again. But believers have no need for ‘darkness’ services. Let us leave such things to babbling monks and cloistered heathenism. I Thessalonians 5:5-6 ‘Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

☛ **THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX, OR INSIDE THE BOOK?** Church growth experts tell us to “think outside the box”. They preach that we are to be so creative that we are no longer impeded by orthodox or conventional constraints. This term (outside the box) appeared in the late 60’s/early 70’s in the business world, and is similar in meaning to “lateral thinking.” New Evangelicals quickly adopted this mindset, so now we read of megachurch pastors giving away new cars and wide screen TV’s and dropping Easter eggs from helicopters to draw the crowds to the beat of rock bands. Anything weird is cool. What they forget is that Aaron ‘thought outside the box’ when he fashioned the golden calf. So did the priests when they moved the ark on an oxcart. In both cases their creativity was not only ‘outside the box,’ it was ‘outside the Book!’

This is the essence of heresy and apostasy. Emerging church leaders pretend that Jesus’ ministry was post modern in nature, and that He ‘lived and thought outside the box.’ Their conclusion reveals their ignorance of the Bible and of Christ. He lived ‘inside the Book, the Bible,’ and proved once and for all that there is more creativity, ingenuity, and long term blessing in simple obedience to the Word of God than in the psychedelic mazes of business empires that call themselves churches. Inside the Book has always been better than Outside the Box.

The author of “**The Gospel According to Disney**” says that Walt Disney preached a religious message through his cartoon characters, a message that “faith is an essential element--faith in yourself and, even more, faith in something greater than yourself, even if it is some vague, nonsectarian higher power” (Mark

