

THE SUBTLEST WAY TO MAKE THE TESTIMONIES OF NONE EFFECT

(A. Leroy Moore; June 9-15, 1992)

Part I: Law, Spirit of Prophecy, and Search for Truth

To the law and to the testimony! If they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them (Isa 8:20; NKJV).

The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (2 SM 78).

Unity between the law and the testimonies has characterized our movement from its infancy. But that unity has also always been under attack. To violate either is to threaten both. For both represent Christ, Whose authority Satan continually seeks to subvert. The law represents the government and authority of Christ. The testimonies expose Satan's attempts to strike at Christ by undermining the law. Thus the law is affirmed and its principles are amplified by the testimonies.

Satan's attack on truth is in the guise of protecting truth. This is forcefully illustrated by Jesus' words: "[T]he time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service" (Jn 16:2; 1 NKJV). How can Satan so confuse the mind? By stimulating a sharp focus upon one part of truth that either denies or keeps attention away from another part of truth.

Truth has two sides. Jesus implied an "inside" of truth as well as an "outside" in his charge to the Pharisees who "make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness" (Lk 11:39). The outside part of truth is what is seen. The inside or inward part of truth is not seen. It has to do with the heart, the emotions, the mind. Prime examples of Jesus' recognition of these two sides and His habitual emphasis upon truth's inner side permeate His sermon on the mount:

You have heard that it was said . . . , "You shall not murder," But I say
You have heard that it was said . . . , "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust" (Mt 5:21-22, 27-28; NKJV)

Far from undermining the law and doctrine (outside of truth) Jesus magnified these and made them honorable by illustrating the true nature of theology. He applied statements of truth relating to behavior to the inner man (See Isa 42:21). Indeed, the above applications were to illustrate His declaration: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill"—thus fill full with inner meaning that which they had themselves destroyed and made dishonorable by reducing them largely to external behavior. Jesus makes it evident, however, that the law and true doctrine ("the prophets") must underly true theological application.

Unless internal application is based upon genuine statements of truth, it will "destroy the law [and] the prophets". Thus our doctrinal formation from 1847-1849 was crucial. As the "little flock" engaged in intense individual and group Bible study, the Spirit sought to teach more than doctrine. By teaching us to submit one to another in the Lord through His Word—which I call "priesthood of believers"—He wanted to prepare us for ongoing theological development.

To certify that our doctrinal pillars rest firmly in Scripture and also to provide a model for future development, God bound the mind of Ellen White so she could not even understand the various arguments. Then when agreement among the brethren seemed impossible, He opened her mind in vision and confirmed His truth by testimonies that brought Bible truth into clear focus.

The law, the Sabbath, the non-immortality of the soul, the sanctuary message with its final judgment

followed by the second coming, and the spirit of prophecy, were not intended to end our search for truth, but to provide an unerring basis upon which a vastly broader and more complex system of truth was to form—again, through Bible study and spirit of prophecy confirmation.

Christ's personal authority is the key to our doctrinal foundation and subsequent theological formation. This underlies His law and all Biblical revelation, which merely amplifies it. The same authority lies behind the spirit of prophecy, which places Biblical truth under a magnifying glass. Our only hope of avoiding Judaism's history was to continue a process of tracing the external authority of His written messages back to their personal Author(ity). But failure here permitted the external authority structure derived from Christ—a law/judgment, doctrinal orientation—to stimulate the self-satisfied legalism described by the True Witness to Laodicea (Rev 3:14-17).

From the beginning of time the crucial issue has been proper transition from external authority of law & doctrine *over our lives* to internal authority of love relationships *in our lives*. God's people have ever been troubled by opposite errors relating to authority: some cling to law as law (doctrine)—rather than internalizing principles in a manner that its legal aspects are seen in terms of love relations; others, in the name of internal application (relationships—so called), react by disregarding the law.

Transition from doing because we are so told by parents or the law—or even the gospel, to doing because we love Christ and discern the glory of His purpose, is necessary to spiritual growth. For example, the decalogue (central pillar) must not be seen as law so much as principles of life and happiness (Ps 16:11). Yet its authority must be fully sustained in the process. And the spirit of prophecy, which conveys the same authority—of Christ Himself—must be seen not as additional commands but as His ongoing guidance in maturing, divine-human relations. Yet this must not encourage violation of its instruction regarding the nature and function of those relations.

Whether we rivet attention upon doctrine to preserve the law (as did the Pharisees) or despise doctrine and law in pursuit of spiritualistic relationships (a cloak for crass materialism as the Sadducees), we err. Search for truth is diverted whenever opinions are not surrendered to the authority of Christ *in His Word*. But, as we shall see, this is not easy. For each identifies his opinion of God's Word with the Word itself. Surrender requires that two seemingly contrary principles combine: individual responsibility to the written Word—no matter what others believe; and responsibility to submit ideas to the brethren in recognition of God's purpose to guide the corporate body into deepening truth—through His Word.

The first principle prevents surrender of conscience to the group. The second both guards the individual against developing his own heresy and guarantees corporate growth. For when each is subject to the body, all assume a humble, teachable attitude as well as responsibility for purity of truth. There are thus two parts to the priesthood of believers principle: individual responsibility, both in confessing our own sins to Christ and in representing Him according to convictions based upon the Word; and corporate authority of the priesthood of all believers in which each is subject to the body—even while retaining individual accountability and responsibility.

Proper interdependence between the individual and the body guarantees growth for all as they unite in pleading for the Holy Spirit to guide them, as He did at the birth of our movement, through the Word and testimonies and in harmony with pillars of truth then established. Unfortunately, we did not continue to develop this two-fold principle—third plank in the Protestant Reformation. Our history testifies that when these principles are not combined, development is stunted and distorted, and vital doctrines become legalistic stumbling stones.

This will be illustrated in Part II by the conflict over J.H. Waggoner's 1854 book, *The Law of God*, and its impact upon the sadder story of the Minneapolis crisis three decades later.

Part II: Priesthood of Believers Must Work Both Ways

J.H. Waggoner (JHW) saw that too exclusive a focus upon doctrinal truth—in defense of the moral law that caused us to relate Paul's warnings against trying to be justified by the law strictly to the ceremonial law), threatened us with the Galatian heresy. But instead of presenting this to the brethren privately to be tested, he proclaimed it publicly as present truth to be received. Had he humbly submitted to brethren of experience his findings that the law in Galatians was the moral law that is to drive the believer to Christ as his only source of righteousness, he might have avoided a second error. For the brethren could have provided ample evidence to an open mind that it *also* involves the *shadow law* that directs the believer to Christ as Sacrifice and Mediator.

JHW's response to their part-truth—that the law in Galatians involved the ceremonial law—would have opened the way for them to consider that the moral law was also involved. This would have resulted in a vital process of mutual correction. Instead, violation of priesthood of believer principles aroused the fears of brethren who, to protect the moral law, denied any reference to it. In return, JHW denied any reference to the ceremonial law:

[D]eclarations in Galatians cannot be made to apply to the ceremonial law, . . . not a single declaration has been found therein which can be referred to the ceremonial or Levitical law. We . . . expect that all will agree with us, that this treats solely of the moral law . . . (JHW, *The Law of God*, 1854, pp 73-74; *Manuscripts and Memories of Minneapolis* (MMM) 12; Pacific Press Publishing Assn)

Though right in its primary feature, JHW's interpretation was the main weapon by which Evangelicals wrongly fought the law and Sabbath as legalistic denials of the cross. Dogmatic statements and denial of any ceremonial law application thus stirred controversy and called forth a letter of reproof from Ellen White and removal of his book from circulation by James White.

That conflict and letter seriously impacted the movement three decades later when, to counteract legalism by shifting the focus from law and doctrine to the law's Author, to Whom all true doctrine points, E.J. Waggoner (EJW) and co-editor, A.T. Jones, printed similar principles in the *Signs of the Times*.

Convinced that the Ellen White's testimony to JHW had denied the moral law application, Butler and Smith began immediate public opposition. EJW had indeed repeated his father's errors. He not only denied a ceremonial law application in Galatians; but he did not submit his concepts to the brethren. Consequently, he and Jones also received a letter of rebuke from Ellen White advising them to consult with the brethren. They accepted the rebuke penitently. But brethren who had violated the priesthood of believer principle outlined in Matthew 18 were in no mood to fulfill their part by kindly and objectively studying the matter with them in mutual submission to the Word of God.

Ellen White strongly rebuked Butler and Smith for their continued public war upon Waggoner and Jones. But they surrendered to Satan's most subtle way of making the testimonies "of none effect." They accused Willie White of joining Waggoner to influence his mother against them. Thinking to defend the testimonies, they used a testimony that seemed to agree with them to deny what would correct them! In total self-justification, Butler replied: "[Y]our son, W.C. White, is more responsible for it [the conflict] than any other man." (MMM 94-95 (1/10/88))

Butler's repentance was longer in coming but more complete. Smith, meanwhile, confessed to a wrong spirit but never changed his position regarding the issues. In 1900 he wrote H.J. Adams:

I have never seen occasion to change my position since 1856. Brother J.H. Waggoner . . . took the position that the law in Gal. 3:19 referred to the moral law.

The Brn. in Vermont felt so deeply over it, that Elder Stephen Pierce came on to Battle Creek, to have an investigation of the question. Meetings were held some three days studying the subject, in which we all became satisfied that the position of Eld. Pierce was correct. Bro. and Sr. White both agreed to it. Bro. Pierce's position was that "the law" in Gal. referred to the whole law system; and the law system was the moral law as a rule of life, and the ceremonial law as a means of recovery from sin, or justification from sin, or the transgressions of that moral law. (MMM 304; Oct 30, 1900).

In designating "the whole law system," Smith clearly confirms the moral law in Galatians. But his refusal to practice priesthood of believer principles imposed permanent blindness within him in the use of Ellen White's confirmation of Stephen Pierce's findings to deny both reproof to himself and E.J. Waggoner's application of Galatians to the moral law! Smith thus unwittingly acknowledges the primary principle of both father and son. Nevertheless, continuing without a break, he insists:

According to this, the law that was "added," and that was "our school-master" was the ceremonial, or remedial law.

No! "According to this" it is both! But by continuing to violate priesthood of believer principles, JHW also chose to remain blind. For this he was reproved. Smith continues:

Brother Waggoner would not attend the discussion, and would not yield a particle. A few days afterward, Sr. White had a vision . . . and wrote to Bro. Waggoner, "I saw that your position was wrong." . . . But now a great many do not know that Sr. W, (sic) has ever seen anything on this question and she has lost what she has written, so it cannot be produced. . . (MMM 304).

Providence permitted the loss of that testimony to test the brethren and to teach us the necessity of priesthood of believer principles. Smith did not need the letter to resolve the confusion. All that was needed was humble, mutual submission of the brethren to each other under the Word. EJW could easily have shown him that instead of harmonizing his reason with the testimonies—which would then have harmonized—he was enforcing upon the testimonies his own theological opinions and memories of a testimony he had never seen. It was not his memory of the testimony but his twisted interpretation that forced him to deny E.J. Waggoner's primary principle.

We must learn history's lesson. When we resist any testimony or principle of revelation by another we reveal that confidence is not placed in divine revelation but in our understanding of revelation. The final test will be to our faith in Christ's authority, which the Sabbath symbolizes. And that authority comes via the whole of Scripture in light of testimonies given to clarify and guard against misconceptions. Our primary duty is to study Scripture. Our findings must then be submitted to test by the brethren and for confirmation by the spirit of prophecy.