

ATTACKS ON HERMENEUTICS, #4

In three previous articles, we have been reviewing the position advocated by a preaching brother here in Texas. We choose to conclude the series by an examination of his claim that since the first century church did not **have** the completed written New Testament, that any **doctrines** revealed in the scripture for today, were not so important as to make any of them a test of fellowship. He states that the "doctrine of Christ" of 2 John 9 refers only to the incarnation of Jesus, and that is the only test of fellowship between believers. He argues that since first century Christians did not have the written New Testament, the things revealed in scripture today are not critical to fellowship and going to heaven. He states that Jude 3 (which contends that we should contend for "the faith") was written "nearly 300 years before the New Testament was collected in a written canon." He states that a written code promotes legalism and death. We have already dealt with these matters, but now want to look at whether the first century church actually **had** the New Covenant of Christ.

Since the old covenant of Moses ended at the cross, we ask, "Were the first century Christians without the new covenant?" Certainly they were not without the covenant until after 300 years when it would put into a canon form. Paul said the apostles were able ministers of the "new testament" (2 Cor. 3:6). We are told that Christ "**is** the mediator of the new testament" (Heb. 9:15), which went into effect right after the death of Jesus (Heb. 9:17). The early church **had** the New Testament in the teaching and preaching of the apostles and prophets. They taught it orally as they were inspired, and also wrote it down so the church would always have a written, documented record of their teachings (John 20:30-31). Paul said the foundation of the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). In Acts 2:42, the early church continued in "the doctrine" of the apostles, which clearly revealed to them that they should worship regularly in prayer, breaking of bread, prayers, etc.. They could only "continue in" that which had been revealed to them, and it was in "words", and they are recorded for our benefit.

The apostles traveled the known world in "teaching and preaching" (Acts 2:42) and by 63 A.D., the whole world knew of Christ and the gospel (Col.1:23). They "spoke" the words of inspiration (1 Cor. 2:13), and often wrote back to the congregations that had been established, and were reminded that they had **already** received this information orally, with a confirmation of it being given in written form. The Jerusalem church had been well indoctrinated, and the other congregations throughout the land were to follow the example of the Jerusalem brethren (1 Thes. 2:14). Paul sent great teachers such as Timothy and Titus, **to** the various congregations to instruct them in sound doctrine (1 Thes. 3:2-4; Tit. 2:1). The very first letter of the written New Testament was First Thessalonians. Paul wrote them and said they had already "received" how they ought to walk, and had received "commandments" from him (4:1, 12). One of these commandments involved "abstaining from fornication" (4:3), and such was **not** a part of the "incarnation", but pertained to "doctrine" of Christian conduct. Paul reiterated what he had taught them "orally" and wrote to remind them of such. For instance, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thes. 3:10). He explained here that this meant to "withdraw" from those who walked "not after the tradition which he received of us"(v. 6). The word "tradition" refers to that which was "handed down" from heaven to the apostles, by means of inspiration by the Spirit. This involved how they were to "walk", and not just accept the incarnation. This ought to be enough to convince false teachers

today, but there is more, as we shall show.

Titus was commanded to “speak sound doctrine” that he heard from the mouth of Paul, which was presented orally. They were bound then by what Paul said, and his teachings are recorded for us now. To the Corinthians, Paul reminded them of what he had already delivered them in person (1 Cor. 6:9, 15, 16, 19; 11:23; 15:1-3).

The “New Testament” was revealed in the first century, even before any of it was written (1 Cor. 2:12-13). Paul said this is what he “spoke”, and is what he “wrote”, and when they read it, they could know and understand (Eph.3:3-5). He also stated that they had the treasure in “earthen vessels”, or human beings inspired of God (2 Cor. 4:7). Hence, the truth of God was in the inspired men, and by the end of the first century it was completed. Their letters were circulated among the churches, and they could **read** God's word of the new testament (Col. 4:16). By the mid 60's A.D. Paul referred to “all scripture” that could make them perfect or complete in all God wanted them to know and do (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

In the Old Testament, God did not begin the Patriarchal or Mosaical age with an instant “completed” written record, but His will was revealed little by little. Isaiah wrote, “But the word of the Lord was to them, Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little” (Isa. 28:13). Moses did receive the written law first, and then later more was added. Even the apostles could not receive **all** the truth at one time (John 16:12), but the Spirit would guide them in their receiving and teaching of all things necessary to life and godliness (v. 13), and they **did** receive these things (2 Pet. 1:3). The Lord began with the inspired spoken word and continued it in written form. The early church was not without all things they needed, for it was revealed by inspired men. God set some in the church, “first apostles and then prophets” (1 Cor. 12:28). Then in the next chapter, he spoke of their knowing and prophesying “in part” until the full revelation could be given. Paul stated that God gave some apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (gifted, v. 7), “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 2:11-12). This was to last “till” they could come “in the unity of the faith”, that could bring them into the knowledge of the Son of God, “unto a perfect” (complete) man (v. 13). Then they would no longer be tossed around by false doctrine, but would have the fulness of truth (vs.14-15).

Thus, the first century church **had** the New Testament, revealed orally to them, as well in written epistles that were circulated among the churches, and confirmed by the inspired apostles and prophets until such time as the writings could be collected into one volume.

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