

Core Doctrines of the church of Christ

Based Upon Dr. Everett Ferguson's Definitive Work; The church of Christ, An Ecclesiology for Today

All Quotations Are From the English Standard Version Unless Otherwise Noted

Introductory Lesson 1: "BIBLICAL Biblical Interpretation"

I Samuel 15

Background to our Text:

I **God...**"noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt."

A. Amalek was a descendant of Esau

1. Genesis 36:12; 16

- Esau

- Eliphaz

* Timna was a concubine of Eliphaz

- Eliphaz + Timna = Amalek

- vs. 16 -- Amalek is one of the "chiefs of Eliphaz" in the land of Edom

II Genesis 17: **Israel rebelled** against the Lord in the wilderness @ Rephidim

A. No water / vs. 1

B. The people **quarreled** w/ Moses & demanded; "Give us water to drink."

C. The two sins of the people:

a. "Why do you quarrel w/ me?"

b. "Why do you test the Lord?"

D. The people then **grumbled** against Moses.

E. Moses **cried** to the Lord:

a. "What shall I do with this people?"

b. "They are ready to stone me."

III The response of God **In Word**

- A. "Pass on before the people taking with you some of the elders of Israel"
- B. "Take the staff" that was struck on the Nile during the 10 plagues.
- C. "Go to the rock of Horeb where God Will meet man."
- D. "Strike the rock."
- E. "Water shall come out of it"
- F. "The people will drink."

IV The response of God **In Action**

- A. Moses did as God directed
- B. There were witnesses
- C. Moses called the place:
 - a. Massah -- Testing
 - b. Miribah - Quarreling

Because...

1. The quarreling of the people
2. They tested the Lord by saying; "Is the Lord among us or not?"

V God's **Judgment Upon Amalek**

- A. Amalek (Esau and Edom) came and fought with Israel at Rephidim
- B. War with Amalek
- C. The Lord ordered a written memorial to the victory AND ordered it to be recited into the ear of Joshua.
 - a. "Perhaps" The Book of Wars mentioned in Numbers 21:14(?)
- D. Message to remember: *"I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."***
- E. Moses built an altar & called it:
 - a. "The Lord is my banner."*
 - Pole, standard or staff

- F. Moses said; "A hand upon the throne of the Lord! (Literally; "Because the hand of Amalek is against the throne of the Lord, therefore the Lord has sworn that the") Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

OBSERVATIONS:

1. Jacob took God's Birthright Covenant seriously
2. Esau despised (paid no attention to) God's Birthright Covenant
3. Israel fought with Amalek during a season of rebellion (not believing God's Word) in Exodus 17
4. Israel fought w/ Amalek when Saul rebelled against God by not taking God's Word seriously in I Samuel 15
5. Edom was subdued ONLY two times:
 - By faithful David who delighted in the Word of the Lord
in II Samuel 8:13-14 and by faithful Hezekiah in I Chronicles 4:41-43
6. Haman was an Edomite, a descendant of both Esau, Amalek and King Agag (the king that Saul spared and Samuel slew before the Lord).
7. The last vestige of Amalek perished in the Jewish rebellion against Rome during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d.
8. At different times in their history, the descendants of Esau were known as either Amalekites, Edomites, or Moabites.

How Saul and Samuel Interpreted the Same Word of the Lord Differently

1Sa 15:2-3 Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now ***go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.***'"

-ESV, emphasis denotes the totality of God's instruction

Samuel's Linear Interpretation:

1. Strike Amalek*
2. **Focus on what is stated** at face value, neither adding to or taking away
3. Devote to destruction all that they have
4. Do not spare them
5. Kill man, woman, child, infant, ox, sheep, camel, donkey
6. Obedience is greater than sacrifice for no sacrifice is actually commanded by God in this situation
7. **Silence of detail is a brake to additional action**

"Thus saith the Lord!" - Samuel

Saul's Circular Interpretation:

1. Strike Amalek
2. **Focus on what is not stated**
3. Consult the peoples opinion
4. Destroy all the worthless property
5. Spare the king
6. Keep the best of the animals
7. Build a war memorial to my victory
8. Claim total compliance with God's directive
9. Justify actions for the "greater good" of sacrificing to Samuel's God
10. Sacrifice is greater than obedience even no sacrifice is even commanded
11. **Silence of detail is an accelerator for additional action**

***"Well Samuel, it just depends on what your definition of "utterly" is."
-- Saul***

I Samuel 15, perhaps more than any other, this passage illustrates what disasters can take place when we take God too lightly and presume to do what we please regarding the instructions of His Word.

More Warnings from the Word of God

Pro 30:6 "Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar."

Act 20:28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy

Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained

with his own blood.

Act 20:29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

Act 20:30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Act 20:31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.

1Jn 2:17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

1Jn 2:18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

1Jn 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

1Jn 2:20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.

1Jn 2:21 I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

1Jn 2:22 Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

How do we deny the Father and the Son? Simply by ignoring, disbelieving, disparaging, misusing or taking too lightly Jesus Christ WHO IS THE WORD OF GOD!

Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Joh 1:2 He was in the beginning with God.

Joh 1:3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Joh 1:4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Joh 1:5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Joh 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

Joh 1:11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

Joh 1:12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

Joh 1:13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Joh 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Joh 1:15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'")

Departure & Defense

In the decades following the deaths of the apostles there arose two distinct schools of biblical interpretation, the Alexandrian and the Antiochian. The Alexandrian school was favored by the Gnostics and the Antiochian school was favored by the faithful church. There were huge and distinct differences.

Alexandrian (Alexandria, Egypt) theology is **circular**, stating that any particular passage has multiple meanings. Circular theology proclaims that the original meaning of the author is not knowable or important, that truth is discoverable inwardly and that truth is held individually. The best way to define circular theology is this: scripture has multiple meanings, each meaning is equally valid and therefore when interpreting any given passage one ends where one begins; many questions and no answers. When circular theologians (either Gnostics in the 2nd century or Emergents in the 21st) sit around and discuss a passage, the conversation goes like this; "Well, this passage could mean thus or so OR it could mean the opposite OR it could mean something in between OR it could mean something we haven't even thought of yet." When the discussion ends, everyone leaves feeling good that they searched for the elusive "truth" and that each person in the discussion now owns their own equally valid and privately held "interpretation." Alexandrian theology promises no real answers, just real questions. At the end of the day, there are no moral or religious absolutes and one ends up like the people of Israel at the conclusion of the Period of the Judges where; "...each man did what was right in his own eyes." Here's what Barry Fuller of Fuller Theological Seminary says in defense of the ambiguities of "circular theology;"

"Christianity's love affair with modernity and its universalizing tendencies created a climate in which the general assumption has been that what constitutes Christian faith has been "settled," and therefore any challenge to the status quo is often rejected as unbiblical or unorthodox. **The assumption is a singular understanding of the faith.** (emphasis mine, RM) The easiest way to undermine different perspectives on issues like faith and practice during my lifetime has been to call someone's commitment to orthodoxy into question. But Christian faith is open to discussion. Historically it always has been. It can be questioned and reinterpreted. In fact, I would argue that it is meant to be questioned and reinterpreted. Religion is always a cultural production, and socio-cultural issues cannot be discounted from the ways in which we envision and understand faith. Issues and questions raised by our particular cultural situation not only inform but shape the various ways in which we interpret the gospel. If there ever was a time to question the status quo, it is now."

Let's break down the theological components of the statement:

1. He assumes that Christianity is "modern." It is not.
2. He assaults the idea that the faith has been "settled." It has.
3. He assaults the idea of singular truth, i.e. there is no such thing as "truth," for there are "many truths."
4. He assaults the idea of pointing out error as "judgmental."

5. He asserts that the Bible can be and should be continually questioned and re-interpreted.
6. He asserts that religion comes from culture, not revelation.
7. He advocates an aggressive assault upon the status quo.

Alexandrian theology is alive and well in the Emergent church movement and especially in the writings of Brian McLaren. In fact, perhaps nothing illustrates "circular theology" more than the name of McLaren's most widely read manifesto; A Generous Orthodoxy -- WHY I AM A missional + evangelical + post/protestant + liberal/conservative + mystical/poetic + biblical + charismatic/contemplative + fundamentalist/Calvinist + Anabaptist/Anglican + Methodist + catholic + green + incarnational + depressed-yet-hopeful + emergent + unfinished CHRISTIAN.

The twin sister of the Alexandrian school "circular theology" is an interpretive method known as *sensus plenior*, the "fuller sense." This philosophy assumes that end-users receive a message from God's Word that goes beyond the mindset and intent of the original author. In the end it arrogantly supposes that the Holy Spirit gives understanding to **people living today** that somehow goes beyond the understanding of ALL persons living in previous times, including the authors themselves! Like a "dynamic equivalent" Bible translation, the focus is on the audience and not on the author. What a person *hears* becomes more important than what God *says*. In order for this "logic" to work, the circular/Alexandrian "multiple meaning" model must be used and the linear/Antiochian "singular meaning" model must be discarded. As in Paul Simon's song The Boxer ©, "Still a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest." It is said that Augustine put it thusly; "If you believe what you like in the gospel, and reject what you don't like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself." (Too bad he did not apply that same principle to Romanism and transubstantiation!) Again, we have come full circle back to the last verse in Judges.

When one adopts circular/Alexandrian / multiple meaning /sensus plenior interpretive methods, it is easy to understand how "singing and making melody" morphs into rock and roll, Sunday suddenly becomes Saturday and the blood bought church of Christ turns out to be just another denomination.

We all should heed the words of the wisdom of Proverbs 30:6; "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." (KJV)

Antiochian (Antioch, Syria) theology, on the other hand, is **linear**, stating that any particular passage has an essential original single meaning. Linear theology proclaims that the original meaning of the author IS knowable and important, that truth is discoverable within God's revealed Word and that truth is to be held corporately. The best way to define the linear or Antiochian interpretive method is this: any given passage holds a single original meaning communicated from the Holy Spirit to the author and from the author to his audience. This single original meaning is discoverable by examining the authorship, the stated purpose for the book, the initial target audience, the spiritual dispensation at the writing, the text, the context, period history, period culture, the grammar and even the words themselves...all in concert. Finally, when the original meaning and intent is discovered, then proper application to our own day and time is then possible. Linear theology is just what it states, there is a beginning point...the question...and there is a finish point...the answer.

History of Interpretive Trends in the West

- Apostolic Age -- 33 a.d. -- 96 a.d. -- LINEAR DOMINATION
- Gnostic Heresy -- 96 a.d. -- 199 a.d. -- CIRCULAR DOMINATION
- Extra Biblical Nicean Defence of So-Called Apostolic Succession -- 200 a.d. -- 500 a.d. -- "Well Intentioned" CIRCULAR DOMINATION
- Dark Ages -- Mysticism and Mystery reign supreme -- 500 a.d. -- 1500 a.d. -- CIRCULAR DOMINATION
- Pre-Modern Era -- (Reformation) -- LINEAR DOMINATION, God & the Bible trump mysticism, mystery and human reason. -- 1500 -- 1789
- The Modern Era -- (Modernism) -- Human reason trumps both God and the Bible bringing us The French Revolution, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, Mao & Pol Pot -- CIRCULAR DOMINATION -- 1789 -1945
- The Post-Modern Era -- (Post Modernism) - There is no such thing as universal truth, it is ALL individual and relative. "That may be true for you but not for me." "That's just your opinion." "Whatever..." This kind of thought has led to the total fragmentation of society, government and Christendom. It has even split the Lord's body. TOTAL CIRCULAR DOMINATION - 1945 -- Present

Fruits of Circular Interpretation Upon Contemporary Christendom

1. Evangelicalism -- A Post-Modern evolution of traditional denominational thinking centered upon the "sinner's prayer" salvation experience, rabid Pre-Millennialism, allegorical preaching and fanatical support for the contemporary state of Israel.
2. "Big Tent" Unity -- All Evangelical roads lead to heaven
3. **Multi Covenant Application**
4. "Dynamic Equivalence" translation preference
5. Emergent Theology -- Coffee House religion

Fruits of Circular Interpretive Methods Within The Lord's Church

1. Community Churches -- churches of Christ that have rejected her name sake
2. Emergent Churches -- churches of Christ that have totally given way to Post Modern thinking and say that everything is just opinion as long as a person repents and is baptized.
3. Surrender Unity -- the surrender by some of accapella only singing for the sake of unity with the self proclaimed "Christian Church."
4. Silence is an Accelerator -- If there is no prohibitive, it is allowed
5. **Multi Covenant Application** -- The Old Testament is used to justify instrumental music, taking of the Lord's Supper on Saturday, etc.
6. Allegorical Elevation -- "Bible Story Time" for adults.