

# THE COMMAND WORD

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"Geneem uit sy werk: *Systematic Theology*, Ross House Books, California, U.S.A., vol.1, p.23-26. [Onderstrepings is myne -slc].

A very common opinion today holds that the Bible is inspired where it speaks of faith and morals but fully a product of its times where it touches on matters of history and the sciences (or the natural world). We are thus told by the many that they are genuinely orthodox even while denying the historicity of Genesis 1-11, the historicity of Jonah, and various statements which seem to set Scripture at odds with modern science. The Bible, they say, is infallible where faith and morals are concerned, but history and nature are outside its province.

The recent origins of this opinion are neo-orthodox and Barthian. The roots, however, go back into neoplatonism and its contempt of material reality and finally into ancient Persian dualism. Implicit in this doctrine, called inspiration fundamentalism, is a division of reality into two spheres. Van Til [*An Introduction to Theology*. Vol.II, Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1947, pp.147f. - SLeC] has observed, with respect to this theory,

*"This theory appears very, very attractive to many serious-minded Christians today. In the first place, it fits in with the common distinction made by modern thought between religious and scientific truth. It is commonly held that the two are quite distinct from one another. Science is then supposed to deal with the spatio-temporal world, while religion deals with the moral and spiritual values that are thought of as being independent of spatio-temporal facts. In the second place, if one accepts the theory of fundamental inspiration, one can let Biblical criticism have its own free course; it is then maintained that all the religious truth taught in Scripture remains untouched even if criticism should prove the non-historicity of many of the facts, recorded in Scripture. With respect to this theory it ought to be observed at once that it is itself a part of the whole non-Christian scheme of interpretation of life. In the first place, the whole distinction between religious and historical truth is absolutely false from a Christian point of view. The resurrection of Christ is an historical fact and upon it, together with other historical facts, the truth of the religion of Christianity depends. Redemption has been historically mediated. It was in history, by historical persons, that sin was committed. It was therefore also in history, by the Son of God assuming a human nature and paying the penalty for sin on the cross, that sin is removed. We need, therefore an authoritative interpretation of the once-for-all significance of these redemptive historical facts. There is no Christian...religion apart from history.*

*Here again, Barth and his school are on the side of Modernism. Barth, as well as the Modernists, is virtually indifferent to the historicity of the facts of redemption. That is, the real significance of redemption, according to Barth is ideational rather than historical. In the incarnation, Christ only touches history as a tangent touches a circle. Redemption is, according to this point of view, a process by which men are taken out of the historical and made something super-historical. It is no wonder that, such a conception of history, Barth and his school [wat ook goed gevestig is in S.A. - SLeC] are indifferent to Bible criticism, and ridicule the theory of an infallible Bible.*

Such a doctrine in effect raptures a man out of history even while he is in it. It makes the faith non-historical and hence irrelevant. For all such, it is not only history and nature which are outside of God, but also faith and morals ultimately.

The reason is simply the doctrine of God implied in this theory. God does not speak infallibly regarding history and nature, we are asked to believe. Such a God is not sovereign, nor is He literally then the maker of heaven and earth and the determiner of all history. He is a figure outside of creation, giving moral and religious counsel to an

alien world. Not surprisingly, the advocates of this theory are uniformly antinomian ["anti-wet" -SLeC]. If they profess to honor God's law, it is only on a selective basis: laws against murder, but not necessarily capital punishment for murder; laws against adultery, but not the death penalty for it; laws against theft, but no laws for restitution; and so on. Such a principle of selective obedience is not obedience to God but rather obedience to our own selective and superior reason and conscience. Instead of a sovereign God, we have a sovereign man. Scripture is reinterpreted to remove its offense, while still used to substantiate man's claims to be the humble and obedient servant of God.

If God is indeed our Lord, and maker of heaven and earth, then He can speak only infallible about nature and history. His word is then a binding law and the operating premise of man in every sphere of life and thought. Our eschatology will then reflect His lordship. An infallible word which deals, as "the Bible plainly does, with history and nature implies the manifest duty of man to exercise dominion in those spheres in the name of God. The Bible is a command word. We are regularly told by antinomians that God, for example, does not require us tithe any longer; rather, He supposedly wants our free-will gifts only. Of course, any decision to tithe involves man's will also, and his free exercise thereof, but the tithe makes clear, as the whole law does, what the will of God is, and what our duty is. We can obey.. or disobey, but to set the terms of obedience, and the nature of the obedience, by our will is to deny God's sovereignty and his Sovereign claim over us. Because the Bible is a command word, it is not designed nor does it speak to satisfy our curiosity, but rather to declare God's purpose and law, and to command our faith in and obedience thereto. The command word of a sovereign God can only be an infallible word, and a law word. The Bible does not seek rational man's assent, because rational man is a myth. It speaks to a fallen and depraved man whose need is the word of life, and the way of life, Jesus Christ, and the law of that life and person.

A command word is an impossibility for the *inspiratio fundamentalis* doctrine: its god cannot speak such a word. To say then that we believe one aspect of Scripture - its teachings concerning faith and morals - but not another - its teachings concerning nature and science - is to deceive ourselves and to lie to God. By setting ourselves up as judges over what is true and untrue in His word, and by ruling Him out of nature and history in any sovereign sense, we deny that He has *any* infallible word for man in any sense. Man lives in nature and history; he acts in nature and history. If man is more active in nature and history than God is, then it is the word of man which rules us, quite logically. Such a God can only tell us to leave the world, not how to exercise dominion over it. The word of man then becomes the command word for history and nature.