

The *Both Ways* Philosophy

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Introduction

A childish trait that many seem never to outgrow is the desire to have certain things “both ways” when it is not possible to do so. In all such cases, the choice of one item, course of action, or result immediately and automatically excludes the other—one cannot have it both ways in such matters. A student might like to get all “As” on his report card without ever fulfilling an assignment, but he cannot have it both ways. One cannot become a concert violinist while refusing to seriously study and practice the violin—she cannot have it both ways. No mature person would be so foolish as to expect to receive a heart transplant without his surgeon’s making an incision and opening his rib cage—he cannot have it both ways. Only an irrational person or a postmodern philosopher (but I repeat myself) would contend that the sum of two plus two is both four **and** five. One must make a choice between believing that the earth is round or flat, because it cannot be both.

Worldlings

While rational folk have figured out this principle in most applications of life, there is one realm in which men generally seem to ignore completely and/or deny its application—the realm of religion. Some examples readily come to mind:

- Most people are seemingly convinced that error is just as good as the Truth for producing Christians, but they cannot have it both ways. Either the Truth makes us free or it does not. Jesus said that the Truth—nothing more or less—makes us free (John 8:32). It is impossible to have it both ways—that both Truth **and** error save. Everyone who has believed and obeyed some message besides the Gospel has become something besides a Christian. Seed (whether spiritual or physical) has always and still does produce only after its kind, if it produces at all. Tares cannot produce wheat, and Baptist (or Catholic or Methodist...) doctrine cannot produce Christians. One cannot have it both ways— that error is just as good as Truth for producing children of God and saving the soul.
- Most folk want to have it both ways when it comes to the way they live and their eternal destiny. Millions profess to believe in Hell, but they cannot name anyone whom they believe will go there. They want the license to live a worldly, secular, or even hedonistic life, but nonetheless to hear the Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” at the Judgment. It will not happen. In the first place, the Lord will not lie. He will not pretend that a reprobate is not one and call him a “faithful servant.” Rather, he will truthfully label him as wicked, slothful,

and unprofitable (Mat. 25:26, 30). In the second place, one cannot walk on the “broad way” and inherit life at last (7:13–14). Wicked Baalam prayed that he might “die the death of the righteous” (Num. 23:10), but it was not possible—he could not have it both ways and neither can anyone else.

Apostates

We expect such loose thinking from those in the world who have had little or no exposure to Biblical Truth and sound hermeneutical principles. However, many who were well taught by faithful parents, preachers, and teachers have grossly departed from that teaching and have enthusiastically embraced the *both ways* philosophy concerning some of the most fundamental matters of the faith. Such irrationality is a trademark of the change agents who are wreaking such havoc in the church, as the following examples demonstrate:

Inspiration

Either the Bible is the verbally and plerarily inspired (and thereby inerrant) Word of God, or it is not. Knowledgeable readers are aware that the Scriptures claim the former for themselves (1 Cor. 2:10, 13; 14:37; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21; 3:16–17; et al.). However, some of the learned pulpiteers in “our” congregations and professors and “scholars” on the faculties religion in schools founded and supported by brethren want it both ways. Ask them if they believe the Bible is inspired and they will answer affirmatively. Further inquiries reveal, however, that they neuter the beautiful word *inspiration* by the various qualifications they place upon it.

For example, Carroll D. Osburn, Abilene Christian University’s highly touted New Testament scholar, wants to leave the impression with gullible brethren that he believes in inspiration. However, the way he describes his view of the term is revealing:

While retaining belief in the existence of the supernatural and emphasis upon the historicity of the Christian faith, other matters are viewed differently. The authority of the biblical text is maintained, for instance, but “verbal” inspiration has given way to “full” inspiration, the use of the Greek text has supplanted the KJV, and texts are studied in their literary and historical contexts (*The Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 63–64).

Osburn ridicules the “fundamentalist” concept that the Bible “...contains God’s own words and is inerrant,” while attempting to wordnap the word *conservative* to describe his own modernistic opinion (*PK*, pp. 62–63).

According to several of his former students, the late Dowell Flatt of the religion faculty at Freed-Hardeman University subscribed to the modernistic “Q Theory,” which asserts that some of the Gospel writers got their information from a mythical document called “Q”(abbr. for the

German word, *quelle*, meaning “source”). At least some of the teachers at Harding Graduate School of Religion also subscribe to this theory, and Rubel Shelly announced his support of it several years ago.

J.E. Choate wrote an article exposing professors at Harding Graduate School of Religion who advocate the modernistic Documentary/Development Hypothesis for the Old Testament and the “Q Theory” and the “Deutero-Pauline Theory” for the New Testament. All such theories deny the Biblically claimed authorship of the various Old and New Testament books and thereby, in practicality, they deny the inspiration and authenticity of Bible.

All who thus compromise the Bible’s claim of inspiration for itself—and who adopt the theories of skeptics and infidels about the Bible’s origin—want to have it both ways. They want to present themselves to a concerned brotherhood as scholars who believe in inspiration, all the while courting the respect of their unbelieving academic peers by acquiescing to their vain theories that reject inspiration. They simply cannot have it both ways; they must make a choice. The choice they have made is evident. Sadly, thousands of gullible Christian parents have paid and are paying dearly (in high tuition costs, but even greater spiritual costs) for allowing their precious children to be sacrificial lambs to such fatal, faith-destroying errors.

Baptism

Either baptism is “for” (unto, ASV) or it is “because of” forgiveness of sins. Some who were once among us now want to have it both ways. Informed readers are aware that the inspired Peter declared on Pentecost that baptism (along with its prerequisite repentance) precedes—and is a condition for—the sinner’s receiving remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Such is the consistent teaching of the New Testament regarding baptism and salvation (e.g., Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 3:27; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet 3:20–21; et al).

Denominationalists (Baptists in particular) have for generations advocated that the preposition *for* in Acts 2:38 means “because of” instead of “in order to receive” in their denial of the place of baptism in the Lord’s plan of salvation. Faithful brethren have successfully defended the Truth and exposed this heresy in hundreds of debates over the past two centuries. However, some who have departed from us dismiss all of the efforts of these soldiers of the cross and reject (with little more than a wave of the hand) one of the most plainly taught and fundamental doctrines of the New Testament.

Carroll D. Osburn blatantly expressed his “have-it-both-ways” desire as follows:

There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the Son of God, but who differ on...soteriological matters such as whether baptism is “for” or “because of” remission of sins (*PK*, pp. 90–91).

Therefore, according to professor Osburn’s “both-ways” dictum, we should ignore the soul-damning dictum of the Baptists that rejects baptism as a condition of pardon and extend fellowship to all of them merely on account of their belief that “Christ is the Son of God.”

For several years some of “our” large metropolitan congregations (e.g., Highland Oaks—Dallas, Richland Hills—Fort Worth, Oak Hills—San Antonio) have accepted members from denominations that reject baptism as a condition of pardon. Perhaps some of these congregations continue to teach and preach the necessity of baptism, all the while admitting people into their fellowship who have not been Scripturally baptized. However, to require baptism of some, but not of others, is as unfair and inconsistent as it is unscriptural. This practice clearly evinces the idiocy of the *have-it-both-ways* philosophy. Having gone this far, can they be very far away from accepting sprinkling and pouring as “viable options” to immersion?

The Church and Salvation

Is salvation found in both the New Testament church **and** the religious organizations that mere men have originated? Can one have it both ways? Bible students know the answer to this question. Jesus promised to build only one church (Mat. 16:18), which He purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28; cf. Eph. 5:25). It became a reality on the day of Pentecost, and those who obeyed the Gospel plan of salvation were saved and added to it (2:38–41, 47). If the Lord ever added any saved sinner to any religious body besides His own, the New Testament is tomb-silent about it. The church of Christ is therefore not only **one** depository of those who have been saved from sin, it is the **only** one to which the Lord adds them (Acts 2:47). Furthermore, the church (i.e., members thereof) of the Bible is the only one that Christ will save eternally (1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 5:23). All other religious organizations will sooner or later (if not in time, then at the Judgment) be destroyed (Mat. 15:13).

Many of those who have abandoned the old paths have done so at this doctrinal juncture. They opine that it is self-righteous, narrow-minded, and Pharisaical to teach what the Bible teaches concerning the exclusive nature of the church and the related subject of salvation. They have made the judgment that it is judgmental that salvation is in and only in the one church. It matters not how loud or how long they hurl their epithets. The Bible still teaches what it teaches and it will still teach those very same things at the Judgment.

The first signal to many of us of Rubel Shelly's departure from the faith he once so ably preached and defended was on this subject. His 1983 pronouncement that "there are sincere, devout Christians in all of the denominations" sent shockwaves throughout an incredulous brotherhood that had difficulty believing that he meant what he had said. He obviously had reached the point of wanting to have it both ways concerning salvation and the church.

Carroll Osburn has likewise expressed his thinking on this point: "Rejecting arrogant exclusivism, Christian fellowship is extended to a broader arena" (*PK*, p. 64). In the book just referenced, Osburn repeatedly refers to the church (as faithful brethren have known it for generations) as "sectarian," "fundamentalist," and "traditionalist." It is obvious that he has far more affection for denominationalism (aptly described by the foregoing labels), than he does for those who are simply striving to make all things according to the Scriptural pattern.

We must not slight Max Lucado, who seems never to have met a Protestant preacher, Catholic priest, or false teacher (still claiming to be one of "us") whom he does not prefer above those who preach the Truth. He admits that he got his concepts of tenderness, passion, faith, grace, prayer, and trust from denominational preachers and Catholic priests (*In the Grip of Grace*, p. 166). (Many of us have long known where he did **not** get them.) His recent admission that he would "make a good Baptist," and that if he ever left Oak Hills "Church of Christ" he would likely not preach in another Church of Christ, only underscores his contempt for New Testament doctrine concerning the church and salvation.

Realistically, these are representative of many others who regularly stand in pulpits of some of "our" largest congregations and/or who lecture to youngsters on "our" university campuses. These folk have totally surrendered the ground, bought at such a dear price over a two-century span, concerning the exclusive nature of the church. They seem incapable of conceiving of the word *church* except in denominational and sectarian terms. They want to have it both ways concerning the church and salvation—that salvation is in the church of Christ and it is also in the denominations. Sooner or later they will learn that they cannot have it both ways.

Conclusion

Some want to have it both ways concerning the music God has authorized for His church, others concerning the Lord's supper, and yet others concerning women as leaders in worship. Some have adopted all of the above items plus additional unauthorized practices and/or doctrines. They all have this common thread: denial that there is only one way that pleases God, and advocacy of the choice to have it both ways—theirs and God's. If not before,

all men will learn at the Last Day that when God reveals and ordains His way, there is no other way. May we all be content with only His way, and may we ever seek to help to others discover it.

[Note: I wrote this MS, and it originally appeared as an “Editorial Perspective” in the September 2002 issue of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, a 36-page monthly of which I was editor at the time.]

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