

DRY BONES By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM



Who defines 'correct doctrine'?

Since we can't decide, let's quit backbiting each other's ministries

Cotton Mather, the 17th century Puritan leader in New England, told the story of the bees.

Bees, Mather discovered, swarm in tribes. However, the tribes are constantly battling each other because they smell differently. Only when the bees are covered with pollen and nectar do they work together peacefully.

Mather, in typical Puritan fashion, assigned "correct doctrine" as the pollen. He felt Christians—especially tribal Christians—would always fight with each other until they were covered with pure doctrine.

Pure doctrine is important. But who among us is qualified to define it?

As I look around I find no one, not even my wife, totally agrees with my doctrine. In fact, I don't even agree with myself, for I keep changing as I grow older and receive more revelation (or is it illumination?).

If you examine the New Testament you do not find Jesus urging His followers to check each other's doctrine—much as a mechanic might check the oil in your automobile.

In fact, the concept of a doctrinal dipstick is totally foreign to the Spirit of Jesus who taught, instead, about specks and beams.

A friend of mine is an airplane mechanic. Every day he goes into his shop and picks up what is known in the trade as a "squawk sheet." With it he ticks off all the things wrong with the airplane engine he is working on.

A squawk sheet has its purpose. It's good to discover what is wrong with an airplane engine—especially when it is on the ground.

Metal filings in the oil filter indicate the engine just might stop running some day. That's unfortunate if you're in the clouds at 9,000 feet over the Great Goosy Tarpits of Idaho.

And a loose gasket on the fuel line is a real danger signal. Unless it is tightened, your plane just might burst into flames.

Thus the squawk sheet serves a real purpose.

But serious problems arise when my friend, the mechanic, carries this same mentality into the church business meeting. Or when a group of pastors get together to talk about what's wrong with national ministries.

Does this mean we should shut our eyes to the metal filings in the ORU or 700 Club oil filter? That we should wink at the loose gasket at the PTL Club or ignore the fact the Roman Catholic Church badly needs an oil change?

Not so.

The question is: are we called to be spiritual mechanics?

Honestly, friends, I'm having a hard enough time getting my own doctrine straightened out. I need help, but only when it is offered in love without threat of rejection.

I like what David said: "Let the godly smite me! It will be a kindness! If they reprove me, it is medicine! Don't let me refuse it." (Psalm 141:5 TLB)

But, there is a vast difference in a dose of medicine from a godly friend, and waking in the middle of the night and finding your room full of doctrinal detectives looking under your bed.

"Sure there are extremes. There is a story going around California that an entire church died from an overdose of 'Copelandhagin.'"

As a friend says, "I used to have wings, but that was before the backbiters chewed them off."

Several years ago it was chic for charismatics to sneer at Ft. Lauderdale. Our squawk sheet was filled with items like "Deliverance," "Discipleship," etc.

Now it's the Tulsa Boys who have become the target for our criticism. Those of us who have never seen a vision at all criticize Oral Roberts who says he saw a vision of Jesus putting his arms around the City of Faith.

And from our sick-beds we sneer at Kenneth Hagin because he hasn't been sick in 47 years.

And we say, "Hmmm, looks like metal filings in the Tulsa oil filter. Better ground that overseas plane and put the passen-

gers on a rusty old tramp steamer leaving next year."

Sure there are extremes. There is a story going around California that an entire church died from an overdose of *Copelandhagin*.

But the problem is that while I'm out "nipping" (I don't really "backbite," I just "nip") at others, my own church is about to fall to pieces around me.

When was the last time you heard anyone give unreserved praise to anything? "Yes, but" has almost replaced "Praise the Lord" on the lips of many charismatics.

I was in a leaders' meeting recently with T. L. Osborn of Tulsa. Osborn has spent much of his life preaching in underdeveloped countries. One of the men asked him what he found wrong with the churches of America.

Osborn's eyes got misty. He said, "When I come back from Africa and sit in an American church, I cry. Your music, even in the smallest American church, is a hundred times better than any church in India.

"Even the most uneducated American preacher preaches better than most African preachers. There is so much good in American churches I can't find anything wrong."

It was one of the most refreshing statements I have ever heard.

A national leader told me that as he was on his way to speak to a group of pastors, the Lord spoke to him. "Only at the level you are able to love those with whom you disagree, are you able to love me."

Instead of exhorting the pastors, my friend got up and asked them to forgive him for his harsh judgments.

Revival broke out.

It's fun to throw rocks at Crystal Cathedrals, but our enemy is not inside the Body. He does not live in Tulsa or Ft. Lauderdale. Our enemy is the devil who is murdering and corrupting innocent lambs; defiling and deceiving struggling shepherds.

What then, is the pollen and nectar that unifies the battling tribes of bees? For tribal people we are and tribal, it seems, we will remain. Is it not the Holy Spirit who unites? Then, as bees among the flowers we return to the hive to make our joint deposit in the comb—that the kingdom may be blessed with honey. ↪