



Flea Powder for Itching Ears



*For the time will come
when men will not put up with sound doctrine.
Instead, to suit their own desires,
they will gather around them
a great number of teachers to say
what their **itching ears** want to hear.
2 Timothy 4:3*

Hebrew and Greek Definitions

Any simple English definitions of Greek and Hebrew root words in this series of booklets are not intended to be scholarly expositions, but merely helpful basics. Students who wish to go into more detail on the technical nuances in the ancient languages are encouraged to seek expert advice on what reference works would be most useful.

The definitions of Greek words are derived from a combination of:

The online *New Testament Greek Lexicon* at
bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/NewTestamentGreek/

This Lexicon is based on *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* and *Smith's Bible Dictionary*

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: Greek Lexicon

The definitions of Hebrew words are derived from a combination of:

The online *Brown, Driver, Briggs Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon* at
bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/OldTestamentHebrew/

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: Hebrew Lexicon

English Definitions

Unless otherwise noted, any definitions of English words in this booklet are adapted from the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* at:
<http://www.m-w.com/home.htm>

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Does Your Congregation Have Resident Heretics?

When many people hear the word *heretic*, they think it means someone who believes something that is not approved by the leadership of their own religious group. And when they hear the word *heresy*, they think it means a belief that is contrary to one of the official doctrines of the group.

But that is not really an accurate perspective on the Greek words underlying these English terms, as they are used in the New Testament.

Just what is a *heretic*, and what is the *heresy* he may try to promote? Here's what the *Strong's Concordance Greek Lexicon* says:

G139 hairesis *hah'ee-res-is*

From G138; properly a *choice*, that is, (specifically) a *party* or (abstractly) *disunion*. : - heresy [which is the Greek word itself], sect.

In other words ... a person is not a *heretic* just because he **believes** something different. He is a *heretic* because he is **using that belief to cause division** among those with whom he is fellowshiping.

And *heresy* isn't just a **belief** different from those that show up in an official statement of beliefs of an organization. It is a belief that someone insists on using to **stir up division** among those with whom he is fellowshiping.

Proverbs 6:16-19

There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and **a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.**

I have many friends who believe things I may not agree are soundly proven by scripture. And there are certain things that I believe that I've not been able to persuade others to accept yet. But as long as neither of us feels a compulsion to

shove our own convictions down each other's throats, we can get along just fine!

It is when people are not comfortable with just sharing what they understand, and then allowing others to come to their own conclusions, that trouble arises. It is when new people arrive at a local fellowship group with an agenda that they feel compelled to force upon others at all cost that *heresy* enters the picture.

This booklet provides suggestions for dealing with some of the topic areas that have been the source of considerable upheaval and division and dissension in independent Church of God congregations for many years. This would include the "Sacred Names" doctrine, the nature of Jesus, calendar timing arguments, prophetic speculations, conspiracy theories and more. There is, in general, nothing wrong with studying, discussing, and even debating these issues. What becomes of concern is when they are used as a wedge to divide brethren who have been dwelling together in peace.

Differences in understanding do not have to become heresies. It is how they are handled that is the deciding factor.

Wind and Waves

*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.
(Matthew 7:24-25)*

What rock is Jesus is speaking about here? In one analogy made by Paul, it is Jesus himself:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:10-11)

But in Jesus' parable of the wise man building on the rock, He implies that building on the rock is **building on what He has said**. And what He has said in the context of this passage isn't unusual speculation about prophecy, complex reasoning about how to construct a Holy Calendar, or admonition on how to pronounce Hebrew words. It is the very simple, basic precepts of the Sermon on the Mount!

We each individually need to "build our house upon the Rock" of Jesus Christ and the things He has taught us through the Scriptures. But this concept also applies to the "household of faith," the local congregation. It needs to be built on the Rock too.

There is another Biblical analogy that describes what happens to us individually and to all of us in congregations when we are not grounded on solid rock. We can become ...

... infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. (Ephesians 4:14-16)

There have been winds and waves of doctrine blowing and tossing people around religious circles since the time of Christ. If this hasn't happened yet in your own local congregation, get ready—it surely will in the coming months and years.

Just because an idea is unfamiliar to us doesn't mean someone proposing it is a deceitful, scheming heretic. It is those ideas that divide loving brethren that are truly heresies. Some ideas we have not considered before may actually build even more strength into our foundation, by helping us to understand the teachings of Jesus more clearly. But others may be mere wind and waves that will attempt to tear down rather than build up.

Your fellowship group may have great enthusiasm for the idea of local evangelism. But if the group is not equipped to discern the difference between solid building materials and destructive wind and waves, it is not really ready to reach out and attempt to bring new people into the local fellowship.

Rock-Solid Checklist

A group that is being tossed to and fro on every wind of doctrine and battered by waves of new ideas is not ready to reach out with evangelism to bring more people into such an environment. What can you do to calm the storms and make sure your group is building on the solid Rock?

Step One: Discuss Your Non-negotiables

If you have had the assumption that everyone in your group thinks alike on all doctrinal matters, just because most have the same “church roots,” think again. Perhaps many in your group have a background in their past of involvement with an authoritarian church organization that made its own definition of “doctrinal purity” a pre-requisite to membership. In that situation, it is reasonable to assume all members agree on the basics. But in an environment free from such restraints, it doesn't take long for many to start thinking for themselves for the first time, looking at many topics from a fresh perspective.

This is not necessarily bad, of course! Just because a perspective on a certain topic has been around for a long time in certain church circles doesn't mean it is the Gospel Truth. Then again, fresh doesn't necessarily mean better, either.

The reality is that there are going to be differences of opinion on many matters even in the smallest of independent fellowship groups. Complete, permanent doctrinal unity in independent Church settings, where there is no external force to impose conformity, is an unattainable goal. This should not be surprising—even Paul didn't attempt to enforce conformity in the congregations in the first century.

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:1-4)

The issue isn't that everyone must "all speak the same thing" on **every** topic. What is important is that there is some **minimum** doctrinal agreement on some very **basic** foundational principles, or the group has no reason to exist.

What if some person comes to your group and attempts to persuade everyone that the New Testament is a fraud, and that Jesus never existed? This "wind of doctrine" **has** been blowing around the fringes of many churches for years! Any group which has not decided **as a group** that the inspiration of the New Testament, and the reality of Jesus, are non-negotiable Truths will find it difficult to present a united front in rejecting such attempts.

What can you do to avoid such an impasse?

**Don't wait for a crisis.
Stop everything, sit down together,
and discuss what doctrinal areas are non-negotiable
... and why.**

Step Two: Establish a Screening Committee

If you have been meeting with the same small group of people for years, you may have settled into a certain level of tolerance for doctrinal confusion and bickering. But you need to realize that the stakes get higher when you bring in new babes in Christ ... you do not want to cause little ones to stumble!

Step two begins with **admitting** that without a central denominational headquarters, there is no longer any real doctrinal authority that can impose doctrinal uniformity on the conscience of individuals. It is thus possible that some or all of those in your group consider themselves to now be their own doctrinal authority. And don't be surprised if you find that some of those self-appointed doctrinal authorities also feel an obligation to press their own doctrinal agendas on others.

Thus, even if you have agreed upon some minimal points of doctrinal agreement under step one, you may find that there are people who are going to want to introduce "doctrinal novelties" at every turn that aren't covered under that agreement. If allowed free rein, this sort of situation can turn into almost a circus, and leave the heads of new spiritual babes in Christ spinning. What they need most is a solid foundation in the very basics of the Faith. If they are introduced week after week to the contortions of some doctrinal (or prophetic theory) twig, they are going to grow up very stunted indeed.

How do you address this problem? If you have the sort of local organizational setup that allows just about anybody (or at least any male) to get up and give a talk, preach a sermon, or lead a Bible study, you need to seriously consider setting up some sort of "screening committee" of people you really believe are "full of the Holy Spirit" and have "gifts of discernment." Untried speakers would need to present a general overview of what they plan to speak about to such a committee. Then if a proposed speaker indicates he plans to present material ranting on and on regarding some wild-eyed theory, he can be headed off at the pass—gently but firmly. The purpose is not to squelch anyone from sharing a "new perspective" on some matter. It is, rather, to avoid giving a platform to a heretic—someone who has no qualms about dividing a family of believers over non-essentials.

If you aren't sure you have any individuals spiritually and emotionally mature enough to handle such potentially contentious situations, it would be good to start praying that God send some to you, or reveal to you who among you may really have these abilities.

But don't make the mistake of giving responsibility to people without also granting them authority to actually act upon their discernment. If you agree among yourselves to develop such a committee, and agree on who should bear the responsibility, then agree to **empower them to DO something about random doctrinal snipers.**

Step Three: Resist Spiritual Blackmail

The number of widely-spread doctrinal novelties has become almost limitless since the introduction of the Internet. I have spent many thousands of hours for more than a decade on the Net researching unusual and controversial doctrines

and teachers and groups—and I have barely scratched the surface of even the most influential and notorious! No one can possibly take it all in and sort it all through. Be sure that all those in your group realize that your fellowship group is under **no** obligation from the Bible to provide an “open pulpit,” where anyone is free to spread any agenda they wish with no restraints. Nor is your group under any biblical obligation to sort through the reasoning offered for every doctrinal novelty that comes along. You will need to pray and ask for guidance, both individually and as a group, for just which topics you should investigate and which ones are a distraction rather than a necessity.

If you do so, you may find that some time, perhaps even in the near future, you will be subjected to what may be referred to as “spiritual blackmail” by someone wanting to push their own “idea baby” within your fellowship setting. They may try to tell your group, or the committee with the responsibility for making decisions on topics open for promotion, that **any** attempt at all to restrict anyone from pushing a doctrinal agenda (or prophetic theory or the like) makes you all evil dictators. Church history since the first century right up to the present has indeed been dominated much of the time by dictatorial leaders who imposed their own idiosyncratic doctrinal system on all those under their influence. Some have ruled with an iron fist, and squelched all attempts to even calmly discuss possible honest differences of opinion over debatable biblical topics. Some of the people in your group may actually have been involved with groups that had this sort of environment. Therefore they may be particularly emotionally sensitive to accusations that they are becoming “just like” those whose dictatorship they have rejected.

If you know for a fact that all those who are active, committed members in your group have carefully and cooperatively worked through setting the standards by which you have agreed to gather, don’t give in to this type of spiritual blackmail! Just because you don’t provide a platform for every would-be preacher or prophetic speculator doesn’t mean you are establishing an unhealthy dictatorship. No one is obligated to submit his own conscience to your group’s standards. If he can fellowship peacefully within the parameters your group has agreed upon, even if he disagrees with some of your doctrines or customs, then he will no doubt be welcome at your gatherings. If he cannot, and insists on aggressively pushing his own agenda, you are perfectly within your rights according to the guidance of scripture to suggest that he find somewhere else to fellowship. Someone who belligerently insists you **must** listen to his continued badgering on some topic, even after you have explained why his personal agenda is not welcome, is **not** being just a “brother in Christ” but is setting himself up as a *teacher*. Without direct, divine validation from God that He has, indeed, sent this person to “set you straight,” you are under no obligation to give in to such spiritual bullies.

“Just say no” to spiritual blackmail!

Astounding New Truth?

One of the steps to a healthy, stable fellowship environment for new babes in Christ discussed earlier was to establish a committee of spiritually mature people to deal with *doctrinal novelties*. The purpose of this is not to squelch anyone from sharing a “new perspective” on some matter. It is, rather, to avoid giving a platform to a heretic—someone who has no qualms about dividing a family of believers over non-essentials.

But what if **you** are the one with a “new idea” that you have discovered, and you believe it is vital for you to share it with others? You may have previously thought that a conservative approach within your group to the introduction of doctrinal novelties was wise—but now that you are the one with what you may even believe is “astounding new truth,” you may be tempted to insist all caution be tossed to the winds. You may feel that you have come to understand this new information through the direct leading of the Holy Spirit—and isn’t the New Testament very clear that we shouldn’t “quench the Holy Spirit”?!

Well, yes it is. But that doesn’t mean that being cautious about jumping on the bandwagon of some idea that is new to **you**, and being circumspect about how urgently you press the information upon others, is the equivalent of the idea of quenching the Spirit.

Personal Rock Solid Checklist

If you have a new “idea baby” that you feel just bursting to push on others, you may find it prudent to consider the following checklist first.

- Don’t assume that just because some concept is new to you that it is new to the whole Church of God world. Many may have been studying for decades the topic that you may have just come upon for the first time on some website or in some book or booklet a few weeks ago. For instance, I was first exposed to the topic of the exclusive use of the Hebrew names for the Father clear back in the late 1960s. I first heard about the contention in some groups that observe the biblical Holy Days over “Passover timing” in the early 1980s, and over the “Hebrew calendar” in the late 1980s. I’ve read widely on these topics ever since. It is thus almost humorous to me to read the breathless hype shared by someone who has just recently heard one tiny bit of the reasoning on one of these topics for the first time. They are just so sure that they have stumbled on a truth hidden from almost everyone else for 2,000 years, and that they are obligated to shout it from the rooftops. I may admire their zeal and respect their sincerity—but I still do not believe that they need a platform in a local congregation to push their agenda.

- Don't try to use exaggerated hype to make your new point ... it doesn't work with those who were exposed to the topic long before you.
- Don't talk down to people with whom you've never discussed the topic. You may find that they know a lot more than you about this "new" idea, and you'll only be embarrassed.
- If you are really a newbie to the whole topic, consider not trying to set yourself up as a "teacher" about it.
- A *plausible explanation* is not the same thing as *truth*. Just because you have bought into the arguments of a particular article or website doesn't make it so. Consider perhaps studying more about the qualities of effective reasoning before you try to persuade others about the logic underlying your new-found idea.

As Proverbs 18:17 puts it, "The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him."

- If the topic is new to you, you may make the mistake of thinking that it is the "most important" topic one could possibly care about. But if you read through the New Testament, you may find your topic isn't even *addressed*, let alone put in a position of importance of any kind. *Get a clue* from this!
- Get your priorities straight. If you study the whole New Testament, you may conclude that "doctrine" is the most important reality of all. I haven't found that to be true, but if you have, you may have to "stand your ground" and be willing to be rejected and have to "stand alone" for that tiny tidbit of doctrine that has caught your attention. But maybe, just maybe, God's priorities are different from that. Try lining up the passages in the New Testament about "unity in the body" and "not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together"... with your non-negotiable doctrine that may threaten to separate you from everyone. You may conclude in the end that you must make your stand for the doctrine. But be sure to count the cost first.

There **is** a right *division* coming in the world and the church some day. But the divider will be Jesus Himself. And what is **His** criteria for such division? It is found in the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25. Humans who choose to divide the flock over some debatable doctrine may find themselves some day on the wrong side when Jesus gets around to the really important division.