

The Basic Life Principles of BILL GOTHARD

BENEVOLENT MINISTRY OR BONDAGE MAKING?



by G. Richard Fisher

During the past two decades, Personal Freedom Outreach repeatedly has been asked to provide analysis of the teachings of seminar leader Bill Gothard. Most who have contacted PFO report negative results from a following of Gothard's strict teachings. This author had surveyed the teachings and writings of Gothard a number of years earlier in an article in *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*. Two years ago, in the spring issue of *The Quarterly Journal*, PFO reported on the heavy legalism of Gothard's teachings in an article titled "A Study in Evolving Fadism — The Cultic Leanings of Bill Gothard's Teachings."¹

Following publication of the article, PFO received even more phone calls from people whose lives, marriages and even churches had been or were being disrupted by Gothard's legalism.

The article also resulted in requests for radio interviews and seminars. Other ministries, including Christian Research Institute, used and distributed the article in response to requests for information. Midwest Christian Outreach, realizing the seriousness and magnitude of the teachings, began researching and publishing its own findings. Midwest Christian Outreach's leadership also met with Gothard but produced no change in his positions.

Gothard and his organization have responded to the mounting criticism in a negative, cruel and self-defeating fashion. For example, last October he submitted a seven-page paper to PFO titled, "A Response to Richard Fisher's Article on The Teachings of Bill Gothard." The report credited no author. In response to a phone inquiry last October, Gothard told PFO that the paper had been done by a "team" but he would not identify by name, gender or background the makeup of the "team." PFO has been told that Gothard sometimes uses young employees or volunteers to do research.

A few days later, Gothard's organization sent a revised version of the response. The four-page rewrite said it was the product of "several members of the Institute staff, headed by Roy Blackwood." Blackwood is part of Basic Life Principles' Board of Directors. The other members of the "team" were not identified.

This revised response says that this writer, in his article in PFO's *Quarterly Journal*, is reacting to Gothard's high standards. The implication is that anyone who questions Gothard has low standards. However, a rereading of the PFO critique makes it obvious that it is Gothard's *interpretations* of Scripture and the imposition of them

into the lives of others that are being criticized.

Last November, another version of the response appeared. It featured no substantial changes apart from the smoothing out of some rough wording pointed out during a phone conversation Gothard had with this writer.

After Gothard had sent his original response, he told this writer that he wanted to discuss his reply privately before releasing it to other concerned parties. He asked this writer to keep the respective responses private for the time being, "for the greater cause of the body of Christ."

However, PFO learned that Gothard already had begun publicizing his response. When PFO confronted Gothard, he admitted that it had been sent to Dr. Norman L. Geisler (who is on PFO's Board of Reference) and Hank Hanegraaff of the Christian Research Institute (because CRI is distributing the original PFO article). Even then, Gothard withheld the fact that he had sent the response to at least one other ministry known by PFO. When pushed to tell the truth, *he did not tell all the truth*. Since Gothard sent to others the longer, first edition, this response will refer to it unless otherwise mentioned.²

(continues on page 7)

The previously published article in *The Quarterly Journal* examined large amounts of Gothard material. Gothard has never requested the doctrinal statement of the Baptist church of which this writer is pastor, nor has he requested the doctrinal statement of PFO to determine what beliefs it holds. Gothard's charges are ill-informed and unfounded. Moreover, because of disagreements with his biblical interpretations, Gothard has insinuated that this writer has a low view of Scripture.

Old habits die hard and Gothard seems to have learned little from his past encounters with critics. Over 20 years ago, author Wilfred Bockelman observed:

"And even when finally confronted with an objection, Gothard, according to one alumnus, doesn't show how his position is more reasonable, but merely falls back on his interpretation. Then he takes any further objection to be an attack on the Bible, not a questioning of his own interpretation. ... Gothard has a very low opinion of reason."³

Gothard's — or the team's — response is consistent throughout the seven pages, using straw men, negative innuendos, scriptural distortions, practical misinformation, name-calling, false witness, character assassinations and false accusations. In many cases it does not answer with Scripture (except to try to mislead with proof-texting), but lapses into *ad hominem* attacks.

In a January 1997 debate on a Chicago radio station in which this writer participated, Gothard was pressed as to whether his teachings were to be taken as "helpful hints" or dogmatic assertions by which one becomes spiritual. When forced to answer, Gothard responded, "helpful hints." That, therefore, would make his assertions on many personal and peripheral issues not seem too impor-

tant. However, in the defensive response sent to PFO, the subtle suggestions that those who question his teaching may not even be in the Christian camp, make it clear that all Gothard's teachings are seen by him and his followers as dogmatic and right in every last detail and as "do or die" issues.

ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Page one of the response mentions the subject of "Divorce and Remarriage." Let it be stated that this writer agrees with Gothard statements regarding a high view of marriage. This writer has spent the last 30 years in ministry emphasizing the permanence of marriage as Jesus did, as well as doing premarital counseling and marrying only believers to other believers. Along with that there have been years of crisis intervention and constant marriage counseling, helping salvage many homes to the glory of God. This writer looks for reasons to keep marriages and families together. To suggest otherwise is to lie.

The Gothard response quotes the critique's statement, "All of Gothard's early materials make plain that he does not believe a divorce can take place for any reason whatsoever. He avoids the exception clause of Matthew 19:9." Note the words "early materials."

He does not refer at all to later statements in the article such as, "Further confusion has been added by the publishing of Gothard's *Rebuilder's Guide*, in which he says 'The exception clause does refer to illegal marriages such as incest. It may also refer to immorality during the Jewish betrothal period.'" The point in *The Quarterly Journal* article was that the context of Matthew 19 does not support the incest/betrothal idea and those words are never used in that chapter. As well, the incest/betrothal teaching came later through Gothard's use of Charles Ryrie.

Gothard suggests that this writer's questioning of his interpretation of

the Matthew 19 exception clause amounts to looking for rationalizations to dissolve marriages or "looking for justification to violate marriage vows" is horribly misleading. Disagreeing with him on this subject is not tantamount to having a low view of marriage or condoning indiscriminate divorce.

Gothard is right when he defines *porneia* as unlawful sexual activity. It is clear that Jesus said in Matthew 19:9 that there was no divorce "except for sexual immorality" (*porneia*). Making an exception where Jesus does is safe ground. Refusing to make an exception where Jesus does is dangerous and adds to the Word of God putting that person, in fact, above Christ. It binds people with a yoke as the Pharisees did.

Then Gothard talks of a "porneia marriage" and distorts 1 Corinthians 5:1 by saying, "The incestuous marriage of a son with his mother (I Corinthians 5:1) was a porneia marriage." First, the passage cited is not talking about marriage at all, but incest of a son with his mother. Secondly, the passage states clearly "that a man has his father's wife." How could his mother be his wife when the text says she was his father's wife? It is clear that this is not a "porneia marriage" (whatever that is) and not a marriage at all, but a clear case of incest and has nothing to do with Matthew 19 and the exception clause. The context of 1 Corinthians 5 is heinous sin and church discipline.

Gothard then states that, "A homosexual marriage would be a porneia marriage." However, in the phone conversation referenced above, Gothard admitted that there is no such thing as homosexual marriage. There is no way Jesus could be referring to "homosexual marriage" in Matthew 19 since it did not exist — and does not exist — and Matthew 19 refers to male and female in the bonds of marriage. Even if a "homosexual marriage" did exist, Jesus would not be addressing "their right to divorce." Surprisingly, the third version of the

Gothard response still ignores the facts. It reads, "*Porneia* relationships would also include sodomite 'marriages' which are now being proposed in America."

To state clearly, homosexuality is *porneia*, sodomy is *porneia*, incest is *porneia*, adultery is *porneia* and fornication and child molestation are *porneia*. *Porneia* is any kind of sexual immorality. This can be established easily and quickly even by someone not knowing Greek. More in-depth studies are available to the English reader through the works of Gerhard Kittel. *The Greek New Testament With English Notes* states: "Our Saviour here ... limits the lawfulness of repudiating a wife to the single case of adultery."⁴

Unlawful sexual activity (*porneia*) may be grounds upon which one may consider the possibility of divorce according to Jesus in Matthew 19:9. If there is repentance and restoration, divorce is not inevitable. This writer agrees with Gothard that divorce "is the beginning of a new set of problems." Even when there isn't a divorce, there may be a whole new set of problems. When people are sinned against there can be horrible consequences and ramifications. God's grace can and must be sought for these.

Gothard then states on page two: "It is significant to note that cults tend to have a disregard for the permanence of marriage and, in fact, encourage their break up when it suits their goals." Gothard should be very careful here since PFO's ministry and by report, other ministries, have received calls telling of marriages troubled or broken because of Gothard's legalistic teachings.

Gothard's position seems to be, as evidenced just on the first two pages of his response, that those who don't agree with him on every point must be doing the work of the enemy and contributing to the demise of the American home. This kind of elitism can produce pride and judgmentalism in followers.

In last October's phone conversation, Gothard said he believed in "separation." Yet he offered no biblical support for such "separation," nor did he explain on what grounds. This writer rarely would counsel separation except when there is threat to the life and safety of a spouse or children and with a view toward counseling and restoration.

So throughout the first section of Gothard's response there are negative innuendoes, scriptural distortions, practical misinformation, along with false accusations. And that's just the beginning.

ON PERSONAL GUIDANCE

On page three, Gothard replies to the questioning of his method of personal guidance. Here he gives as an almost absolute endorsement of guidance through "'God-given authorities' such as parents and husbands." No one would deny that this is generally true. There can be no submission to sinful expectations and children must honor parents (Exodus 20) and women their husbands (Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 3). At least on that we agree. We should not look lightly on God-given authorities. The larger question, however, is: Are those authorities absolute?

Nowhere did *The Quarterly Journal* critique suggest rebellion against any God-given commands. The concern expressed was over "adult single people" and the complex issues of their relationship with unsaved parents and how that applies to Psalm 1's admonition against "walking in the counsel of the ungodly." The issue is far more complex than Gothard would have us believe. Also on page three, Gothard takes issue with an objection to making inner peace part of a Christian's guidance system. The article said, "So, in Gothard's guidance system an inner feeling of peace is the ultimate test." The phone conversation included intense discussion of that issue. However, had the article said, "Peace for Gothard is the last test," it would not have changed two

key facts. First, that peace is no test at all. And secondly, Gothard misuses Colossians 3:15 to try to make his point.

The peace of God is a real and wonderful provision for the child of God (Romans 5:1, Philippians 4). However, it should not be confused with guidance. Fathers must confront their children and discipline them. This can cause grief and unrest despite the fact that it is within God's will. This kind of obedience sometimes brings no peace. The peaceful fruit of righteousness in child-rearing may only come in the long term. There may be times in intense confrontation when we witness of our faith and we feel no peace but only stress. Yet we obey God and try to be responsible witnesses.

The Apostles had no peace on the Sea of Galilee during that violent storm. Mark 4:41 reports they were "terrified." Yet they were in the perfect will of God. Jesus had no peace in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-36). Yet He was in the perfect will of the Father.

We ought not to confuse people by making peace anything else than a by-product. Yes, God does give real peace, but sometimes it is not experienced until long after a biblical course of action has been taken. It is no test for guidance. If we lack peace because of a guilty conscience it does not have to be related to lack of peace but to guilt and confession. If we have lost peace because of sin, confession will restore it as a by-product of being right with God.

Further, Gothard misuses Colossians 3:15 ("Let the peace of God rule in your hearts") and tries to apply it to guidance. As was stated in my article, the context of Colossians 3 is keeping peace in relationships. Note the words in verse 13: "bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another even as Christ forgave you so you also must do."

Note verse 15 again as it says, "And let the peace of God rule in your

hearts to which you were called into one body." Paul is saying have a heart for peace in all your relationships. Be a peacemaker. It is the equivalent of 1 Thessalonians 5:13, "Be at peace among yourselves" and Romans 12:18, "Live peaceably with all men." Paul is saying to have a real heart for peace in your relationships. That is not just a feeling or emotion but a commitment to the maintaining of peace with others.

Dr. Jay Adams is a Greek scholar, counselor, pastor and a fine exegete of Scripture. He brings all these disciplines to his interpretation of God's Word. His careful exegesis of Colossians 3:15, is worth noting:

"The misinterpretation of Col. 3:15 (as *individual* peace — 'I have peace about the matter' — as the basis for decision-making must be rejected). The entire passage speaks of *corporate* relations among the members of the church. Peace is the 'umpire' for the interpersonal relations of the parts of the body to the whole. This is the peace *in the church*; there is nothing about guidance in this passage."⁵

Furthermore, Deuteronomy 29:19 warns that a person can be in sin and convince himself that he has peace. The Word of God — not an emotion — must be our sole source of guidance.

REGARDING CABBAGE PATCH KIDS DOLLS

The Gothard response also says, "Richard Fisher states: '...He [Gothard] taught that the highly popular Cabbage Patch Kids® dolls were causing strange and destructive behavior in children that could only be alleviated when the dolls were removed or destroyed.'" The team then ignores the report of a 1986 letter to PFO from the Gothard organization itself saying that the Cabbage Patch Kids were "a violation of the first Commandment" and a deterrent to children wanting to raise up godly children later in life. Perhaps this letter went out with Gothard's full knowledge and ap-

proval and is now an embarrassment to him.

The Gothard team did cite *The Quarterly Journal* critique's statement that there was "no allowance made for other environmental and social factors in the homes." It appears that letters and testimonials were accepted at face value without any investigation of backgrounds or long-term results. Many of Gothard's teachings are based upon anecdotal stories and devoid of scriptural basis.

The team tries to conciliate by adding, "Bill reported this information during the basic seminar and provided documentation to those who requested it. This produced many additional testimonies from parents who saw dramatic freedom as soon as the Cabbage Patch Kids® dolls were removed. The parents were the ones giving the warnings, not Bill's teaching." This is a useless nuance. If a preacher endorses testimonials from his pulpit, and those testimonials teach something, then the preacher is teaching it, if not directly then by endorsement and approval.

Gothard has published even more claims about Cabbage Patch Kids since that first letter. His January 1996 *Basic Care Newsletter* from his Medical Training Institute defines the potential of the once-popular dolls. The publication stated that there are a core of midwives that are working against "Satan's program from Genesis to Revelation to destroy the Godly seed." This report endorsed by Gothard and his organization then describes "cleansing the home from evil influences." The midwives searched the homes for Cabbage Patch Kids dolls and Troll dolls. They believed the destruction of these facilitated the births. Just having these items in the home retarded a speedy delivery, said the newsletter. Attributing this much power to a doll goes beyond the pale of reason and lapses into pagan superstition.

Testimonials are a slippery foundation. Nearly every cult in the world bases its authority on its testimonials.

That is why some of Gothard's teachings have cultic leanings. However, this kind of numbers game can cut both ways and thousands of parents and children could be produced who saw no harmful effects from owning such a doll. Saying something is an idol does not make it so.

ON INIQUITIES OF THE FOREFATHERS

Page four of the response reiterates Gothard's view on the iniquities of the forefathers and contains false accusation and misinformation. It states that, "Mr. Fisher ridicules the idea of 'some kind of direct consequences of fathers' iniquities to their children.'"

The Quarterly Journal critique did not ridicule but simply questioned and disagreed with Gothard's teaching that we must research our ancestors' sins and in a ritual prayer cast them off our natural or adopted children. Certainly there are social and environmental consequences to parents sinning but exorcistic prayers and quick fixes are not true to the Bible or real life.

One may have a horrible past but grace changes all that. First Peter 1:18 reminds us that we are redeemed (released) from the vain habit patterns and empty conduct of our parents through grace and salvation. I do not want to stay bound by rooting around in my ancestors' past but "am forgetting the things that lie behind." We are instructed by Paul to "forget the things that lie behind" (Philippians 3:13). Gothard's ideas here stem from pop psychology with a veneer of misapplied Bible verses.

Even Gothard's use of Adam from Romans 5 is fundamentally flawed. Romans 5 is talking about the relationship of Adam to *the unsaved*. We are no longer in Adam if we are in Christ. The direct consequences of Adam's transgression and guilt are taken care of in salvation. The results of the fall in nature will be taken care of at glorification. Romans 5 teaches no more than that.

Although each of us has a sin

nature, we must handle that biblically by applying the truths of Scripture and growing in grace, not going back into the past (Romans 6-8). Referencing Adam's sin and trying to relate it to other than the unsaved, as Romans 5 does, is an error which leads to more error. Romans 5 discusses the issue of Federal Headship and the relationship of Adam to the *unbeliever* as contrasted to the new head Jesus and His relationship to the saved.

To prove that we are supposed to confess our ancestors' sins as our own, the Gothard team quotes a number of Old Testament verses that show God's people identifying with and acknowledging their ancestors' sins. No one would deny solidarity of the nation of Israel. The moral unit of the Old Testament was that nation. It is important to note that *all* the verses Gothard references, including a few New Testament ones, *have to do with the nation of Israel*. It is also important to note that this confession is a corporate and *national* exercise. All the people of Israel were in a covenant relationship with God and one another. The covenant community in the Old Testament was the nation. In the New Covenant we are in a spiritual relationship and covenant with Christ and others in the body, not our ancestors (especially if they are unsaved).

Our New Covenant in Christ is unlike the Old in the respect as to with whom we are linked *covenantally*. Israel was linked nationally. There is no longer a *covenant nation* or a *national covenant*. Gothard confuses Israel with the Church. He also tries to impose unique Jewish covenantal practices on the Church.

The Church is called a holy nation by Peter, but only in a spiritual sense. It is this new "nation" of believers that is covenantally linked, not the ancestors of a person unless they are saved. If those ancestors are saved we do not need to confess their sins because those sins are "under the blood." So what Gothard suggests is needless. We are not covenantally linked with unsaved ancestors.

Therefore, there is no sense in which the New Testament believer, under grace, is in covenant relationship with unsaved ancestors, as was racial Israel. Remember also that scripturally the *direct* link with Adam is severed at conversion when a person is placed into Christ. Gothard and his team miss this fundamental fact.

Gothard really does not understand what is called "reparational reconciliation," that is, asking forgiveness for the sins of others in the past. If this is not understood properly, we can, like many, go through "substitutionary voodoo apologies."⁶ Israel was linked as a covenant nation. We are linked by Christ to the covenant body, the Church.

Theologian John Murray warns:

"The principle of solidarity can be exaggerated; it can become an obsession and lead to fatalistic abuse. ... Whatever additional principle of solidarity may be posited or established it cannot be abstracted from the fact of biological ancestry."⁷

We are never told in the Bible to confess a sin that we did not commit *or are not covenantally responsible for*. A believer might more readily confess the sins of his church (i.e., his covenant body), but even this he is not commanded to do. Matthew 18 and James 5 indicate that a Christian may at times, under some circumstances, confess *to* the church. But these passages do not even remotely suggest Gothard's practice.

The Quarterly Journal critique suggested that Gothard missed the context of Exodus 20:5 (visiting the iniquity to the third and fourth generation) by not seeing or dealing properly with the weight of the phrase "of them that hate me." It is obvious that God would carry his judgments out to the third and fourth generation if they continued in their sins and continued to perpetuate their parents' hatred of God. Gothard has ignored mentioning that the very next verse promises

mercy to any and all who turn to Him, in spite of parents. This is all consistent with Ezekiel 18:20-22 and Jeremiah 31:29-30. Perhaps, as well, Gothard needs to think about the difference between consequences and culpability. Confession is always attached to culpability. In conversion, God deals with our culpability as individuals. In sanctification, God gives us His Spirit, His grace and His Word to deal with any consequences and temptations.

Not once when Jesus offered forgiveness did he say, "you are forgiven and the sins of your ancestors are forgiven." Never once does Ephesians 6 suggest reparational reconciliation as a necessity. Such a thought is foreign simply because reparational reconciliation belonged to Israel and the Old Covenant and was not part of the Church's new structure. Think of all the other Jewish practices that fell away under the New Covenant. We are not a covenant nation in the same sense as Israel, but are now in covenant with Christ and His Church.

ON FAMILY STRUCTURE

Whatever the family structure was in the Old Testament, are we mandated to recreate and live under it? On page six of Gothard's response, the team sets up another straw man and issues another false accusation by suggesting that this writer encourages young people to separate from their families. In fact, Gothard has young people separate from their families to go into his programs or ministries.

The team's innuendo is:

"Cult leaders take an opposite view and urge young people to leave their families so that they are free to make their own decisions. These decisions often turn out to be the decisions of those who exploit young people for their own purposes."

The Quarterly Journal critique did mention that Jesus did not get Mary's permission to leave home. We all know that He left home around age 30, so He was not a young person.

Incredibly, the team challenges the statement regarding Jesus not getting permission as an “astonishing misuse of Scripture.”

The team then writes: “He did not forsake His mother, but continued to care for her.” We do not know what Jesus did or did not do for Mary during the three years of His public ministry, with the exception of His statement to John at the cross (John 19:27). We can assume she remained in Nazareth and was assisted by family and friends, but on one occasion when Jesus was asked to meet with her He refused (Mark 3:32-35). This passage shows He did not continue to care for her, probably because she was being cared for by the brothers and sisters with her.

It is also evident that as Paul brought the Gospel to Greeks and Romans, they remained in their existing family structure. There is not a hint in Acts or the Epistles that Paul imposed a Jewish patriarchal structure on the homes of his Gentile converts. Paul did not address the structure *per se* as much as how the interpersonal relationships were to be conducted (as in Ephesians 4-5).

This writer sticks to the position stated in *The Quarterly Journal*:

“The relationship of adult single people to parents, as well as the continuing relationship of a married couple to parents, is quite a bit more flexible and unstructured than in Gothard’s system. At best, the exact relationship of the marriage structure of the Old Testament to the Church is debatable and should not be made a test of spirituality or orthodoxy.”

Christ demolished the idea of a family having to be at the behest of the oldest living patriarch with these words: “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh” (Matthew 19:5).

Leave means leave. The Greek word, *kataleipo*, is used of Moses

leaving Egypt in Hebrews 11:27. This shows finality. We may have an ongoing relationship and friendship with parents as married adults and certainly we respect them, but we are not under them or subject to them. The new family unit is to be totally subject to God and His Word.

ON THE OLD TESTAMENT

On page six of the team’s response, there is total misrepresentation. Gothard (or his team) suggests that the desire of this writer is to throw away the Old Testament. This is a total distortion of what was said in the original report. The article said, “So much of Gothard’s teaching is based on an imposition of Old Testament *legalism*” (emphasis added).

In a letter to MCO apologist Don Veinot, Gothard wrote that the word “legalism” is not in the Bible. However, Gothard knows fully well what the concept is. The word “Trinity” is not in the Bible, but the concept of a Triune God certainly is. Additionally, the words, “Chain of Command,” “Umbrella of Authority” or even “Cabbage Patch Kids” do not appear in the Bible. The point is, how biblical are they and are they scripturally relevant for believers today?

Legalism can be trying to earn salvation by law, as in the Book of Galatians or imposing extrabiblical rules (like Old Testament feasts and fasts) as in Colossians 2:16-23. The Pharisees were notorious for interpreting and extrapolating from Scripture and then making those ideas and extrabiblical rites a matter of divine rule. These were called *tradition*. Pharisaic rules can be called legalism for want of a better term.

It seems that if there is some disagreement with Gothard as to the continuity/discontinuity issue (how much of the Old comes into the New) one is automatically accused of wanting to throw away the Old Testament. For centuries, many fine Christians have struggled over this issue. Gothard does not have the last word on it.

Gothard knows fully well this writer’s position and is distorting it. This is not the first time we have exchanged thoughts on this. In a Jan. 18, 1997, correspondence to Gothard, this writer stated:

“The continuity/discontinuity issue (i.e., how much law comes into the New Covenant) is an issue that requires balance lest one fall into the extremes of the Seventh Day Adventists or regulating the sexual practice of others from Leviticus as you try to do. Certainly good godly men have struggled over the continuity/discontinuity issue and have not lapsed into suggestions that the other is a libertine as you have with me.”

“The safest use of the Old Testament as it impinges and overlaps into the New Testament are the passages from the Old which are clearly repeated and reinforced in the New. I feel safe letting Jesus and the Apostles direct me on that. Otherwise one is on a sea of personal subjectivity picking willy nilly out of the Old Testament. As I see it, this is what you do. Once you commit to arbitrarily pulling something from the Old Testament then you must find a survey, a medical fact, a statistic, something, to try and buttress your choice. ... I love the Old Testament.”

ON CHRISTIAN ROCK MUSIC

Page seven of the response contains more distortions. The team writes, “By giving ‘blanket approval’ to Christian rock music, Mr. Fisher and others are urging young people to dishonor their parents.”

The original critique said, “Gothard launched his campaign against *contemporary* musical artists” (emphasis added). Nothing was said about “rock,” but the critique specifically mentioned “contemporary Christian music.” The concern was that Gothard had become judge and jury over Bill and Gloria Gaither, Dave Boyer, Sandi Patty and Michael Card. He

accused them of destroying the youth of America. He has two published booklets condemning these and other artists. If testimonials were sought, no doubt hundreds of thousands have been blessed and encouraged by these people's gifts.

When asked during last October's phone conversation why he had a staff person with a family member who sang Sandi Patty numbers in her concert, Gothard said, "It shows how broad-minded we are." What it shows is a double standard. Gothard does not run his internal business in accord with his own strict demands on others.

WHAT WAS NOT COVERED

The team's response never got around to addressing *The Quarterly Journal* critique's concerns over Gothard's legislating the sex relations of his married followers, sexual abstinence in marriage, his claim that he

has God's order of worship, his teachings on how women should dress and wear make-up, his incredible misinterpretations of key words such as grace and faith, his forbidding of partnerships, his legislating many minor areas of life by imposing obscure Old Testament passages, the elitism of his followers, the testimonials of spiritual harm and church splits, and other issues. The response given is hardly a response at all.

Gothard's organization, in being defensive, unbalanced and slanderous, has become its own worst enemy. Fair-minded people can see through the convoluted thinking and *ad hominem* attacks. Much heat has been generated, but no light. It is unfortunate that we do not see in the tone or words of the team's response reasoned and biblical interpretation or the principles touted at the Gothard seminars. It is an "us-or-them" siege mentality that does little to further the

cause of dialogue or the cause of Christ.

Endnotes:

1. The back issue of *The Quarterly Journal* containing this article is available from PFO for \$3.00 postpaid. Mail your request, along with payment to PFO-Saint Louis.
2. A photocopy of Bill Gothard's original seven-page response may be obtained from PFO. Send \$1.00 for copying and postage to PFO-Saint Louis.
3. Wilfred Bockelman, *Gothard, The Man and His Ministry: An Evaluation*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: Quill Publications, 1976, pg. 146.
4. *The Greek New Testament With English Notes*. London: A.J. Valpy, 1831, Vol. 1, pg. 129, emphasis added.
5. Jay Adams, *More Than Redemption*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing Company, 1979, pg. 31, footnote 30.
6. See further, David Hagopian and Douglas Wilson, *Beyond Promises*. Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 1996, pg. 235.
7. John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959, pp. 22-23.

THERE OUGHT TO BE A LAW

(continued from page 1)

is called the continuity/discontinuity issue: How much continuity or discontinuity is there as far as the law continuing as a ruling code for the New Testament believer? The issues are difficult and Christians of good will can and do differ.

Stephen Westerholm, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at McMaster University in Ontario, addresses the longstanding difficulties of the issue:

"The question how those with Christian faith should relate to the divine law of Israel was a burning issue in the first Christian century and has remained a crucial subject for Christian theology and ethics ever since. Different answers have of course been given."²

Commenting on the Apostle Paul's statement in Romans 6:14 ("You are not under law but under grace"), Professor of Old Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Thomas McComiskey says:

"The use of the word *under* denotes dominion. Believers are not under the dominion of law, but under the dominion of 'grace.'"³

McComiskey then addresses "the ethic of the ancient law" and adds, "Under 'grace' man has the capability of fulfilling the ideal of the law (Rom. 3:31)."⁴

The "ideal of the law," as far as its specifics, ends up in the eye of the beholder.

It seems clear that imposing obscure or not-so-obscure portions of the Old Covenant on the Church can be a fertile ground for the rise of cultic teaching and manipulation. It can be anyone's guess as to what the "ideal of the law" is. After all, who is the final authority on what and how much of the Old Testament we must observe? How do we define "ideal of the law"? Teachers of Theonomy⁵ would go as far as to want the Old Testament death penalty (for adultery and homosexuality and other sins) imposed on American democracy.

From the Ebionites⁶ or Judaizers (c. A.D. 100s) to the Anabaptists (c. A.D. 1500s), this certainly is not a new debate as Westerholm noted. George Williams, Harvard professor, in his 924-page treatment of these 16th century rebaptizers, notes:

"The Anabaptists differed among themselves as to the degree to which the pattern and institutions of the people of the Old Covenant and their Scriptures were appropriate."⁷

Another subculture of debate is the varieties and variances within the Messianic Movement. Mart DeHaan expresses deep concern over these "Torah observant people" and says:

"I am afraid some Torah-observant people are all too ready to accept a principle Paul rejected. He rejected the idea that law-keeping could be a means of spiritual growth (Galatians 3:1-3). ... I'm convinced that the rediscovery of Torah (Old Testament teaching) can be of great benefit to a church that has forgotten its