

course" (2 Thess. 3:1); (4) The truth has been hindered (Rom. 1:18); (5) A preacher has sold out to compromise and equivocation (Cf. 2 Cor. 4:2); (6) Righteousness has been redefined, and unholy hearts and hands have profaned the pristine purity of the word of God.

Did David Lipscomb violate local church autonomy when he preached against pianos and organs in worship and demanded that they be refused? Did Roy Cogdill, James W. Adams, James P. Needham, Cecil Willis, W.R. Jones, Carrol Sutton, Connie W. Adams and an unnumbered host of others violate local church autonomy when they crossed the country, preaching and debating against the errors of institutionalism and urged churches not to contribute to "orphan homes" and *Herald of Truth*? If so, someone needs to repent and apologize. If not, preaching the truth does not violate local church autonomy.

Consider this: When one says that preaching on certain Bible subjects and insisting that men conform their lives to the truth is a violation of local church autonomy, are they violating the autonomy of local churches who do not agree with their assessment? They meet themselves coming back. They are saying that churches must not put up with preachers who will preach on controversial subjects and demand that men obey the truth. When they do teach, are they not guilty of violating the autonomy of those churches that require that "all truth" be taught and that all submit to it?

Men may plead for local church autonomy in preaching when they have a doctrine they do not want to have examined (Jn. 3:20, 21). So what do they do? They simply redefine the meaning of "local church autonomy." In this way, they seek to bar you from preaching against an error they secretly harbor, or against the teaching of an erring friend whom they endorse. Whether the issue denied involves morals, modesty, Mormons, marriage, or Methodism, it is another case of attempting to redefine righteousness by perverting the concept of local church autonomy. Regardless of their motives, the result is that truth is hobbled and error is coddled when men hide behind the skirt of "local church autonomy" in order to prevent the preaching of the whole counsel of God.

As in every case cited, whether in or out of the church, men who want to retain their righteous standing, but who also want to accept some form of error, will invariably seek to redefine Bible words. To hold to their error, they must give it a "form of godliness." They think that by redefining righteousness they are still righteous. They will fool and deceive some who will be carried away with their dissimulation (Gal. 2:14; Col. 2:8). But it is a lie; it is not "the way of righteousness"; it is not "the right way," it is not "the way of truth," and they will be damned who love and make a lie (Matt. 15:14; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; Rev. 21:27).

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Westside
church of Christ

**"Lord, to whom shall we go? You
have the words of eternal life."**

John 6:68



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Redefining Righteousness

Larry Ray Hafley

Words are vehicles of thought. They are signposts of ideas. The Lord and the Spirit made arguments that turned on the tense of a verb (Matt. 22:32). Words matter (Jn. 21:22, 13). Terms are important (Gal. 3:16). Indeed, they are so significant that one's eternal destiny may rest upon their proper use (Rom. 3:8; 2 Pet. 3:16). Therefore, "Take heed how ye hear" (Lk. 8:18). Also, "Take heed what ye hear" (Mk. 4:24). In summary, "Take heed how you hear what you hear."

The misuse and abuse of words is an ancient error. Isaiah warned, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (Isa. 5:20). As it was done then, so it is being done today.

Righteousness: Obey God's Word

God sets the standard, the rule of righteousness. His pattern of purity must be followed in order for one to be regarded or reckoned as righteous. Upon what basis was it determined that Zacharias and Elizabeth were "both righteous before God"? That "they were both righteous before God" was demonstrated by the fact that they were "walking in the commandments and ordinances of God blameless" (Lk. 1:6). Since "all (God's) commandments are righteousness," those who obey them are "righteous," while those who do not obey them are unrighteous (Psa. 119:172; Rom. 2:8).

"And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us" (Deut. 6:25). Reverse that verse: "And we shall be unrighteous, if we fail to observe all these commandments." Hence, Luke 1:6 and Deuteronomy 6:25 define 1 John 3:7: "He that doeth righteousness is righteous." "In every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him" (Acts 10:35).

Therefore, if one desires to appear righteous, but does not want to obey God's word, he must find a way to alter or change that word. One way to do this is to redefine the terms. By using the words God used, but by subtly changing their meaning, one may seem to be doing what God said. He may be declared "righteous before God" in the sight of men.

The Subtle Shift

This process is commonly used to support and sustain denominational, doctrinal

deviations. From *psallo* ("to sing") to *baptizo* ("immersion"), words have been redefined in order to establish a false doctrine. If "singing" includes "playing on a mechanical instrument," pianos and organs are authorized in worship. If it can be made to appear that baptism is either sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, then "sprinkling" is scriptural baptism. Further, to speak in tongues is the ability to speak a foreign language one has never learned "*as the Spirit* (gives) *utterance*" (Acts 2:4-11). However, if "*tongues*" are redefined as ecstatic, emotional outbursts, one may be accredited with the ability to "speak in tongues just like they did in the Bible!" Illustrations of such variations of words abound. Allow one to define the terms of the proposition, and he often can establish the truth of his position. Thus, one could practice sprinkling for baptism, play the organ in worship, and "*speak in tongues*," and do it all with the authority of God Almighty! Most Christians are familiar with these attempts to redefine righteousness.

Modern Redefinitions Of Righteousness

Drunks and dope addicts are no longer sinners in need of repentance, redemption, recovery, and reception by the righteous. No, they are not "sinners"; they simply have a "disease," or a "chemical dependency" tendency which they likely "inherited" through no fault of their own. Is homosexuality a heinous, horrible sin? Is it "*against nature*," contrary to all standards of decency and morality? No, it is now "an alternative life style," with no sin or shame to be attached, and if you think otherwise, you are a "mean spirited" bigot. When a young girl has a child out of wedlock, has she sinned, being guilty of the sin of fornication? No, you insensitive, hateful brute; she has simply taken up "single parenting." When a Hollywood star fathers a child with one of his harem, has he committed fornication, and is he guilty of immorality? No, you Victorian, puritan prude, you; he has simply fathered a "love child."

You see, folks, if we redefine the terms, anything becomes acceptable and righteous. There is no shame and condemnation when fornication is given vindication (see Isa. 5:20 cited above). Why have homosexuals felt free to "come out of the closet?" Why are people proudly living together without marriage? It is because there is now no shame attached to those forms of behavior. Homosexuals have not become bold. No, the door was opened to their closet by those who say that "loving, committed couples" may be men with men, or women with women. When the social and spiritual stigma was removed, the immoral felt free to flaunt their depravity as those who count it sport to revel in the day (2 Pet. 2:13). All such sinners used to run and hide like a cockroach when the light is turned on, but they no longer do so. Why? Because they are now more brazen and bold than their predecessors? No, but because righteousness has been redefined, they now feel comfortable to "*work all uncleanness with greediness*" (Eph. 4:19). When the climate is right, one goes outside. Likewise, when the moral climate was "right," or favorable, men brought their hidden works of darkness outside. They openly glory in their shame because they are not scorned as once they were.

How does God define "family"? "*For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh*" (Matt. 19:5). In part, at least, a family is seen as "*father and mother*" and children, or as a "*man...and his wife*." This is what God ordered and ordained as family. What is "family" today? A "family" today may be two men living together like maggots on a cow pile. They may force you to rent your property to them lest you be sued for "discrimination." They may even adopt and raise children. They may

be given "sick leave" from work to care for their "mate."

What has occurred? "Family" has been redefined. Hence, two lesbian women's relation ship is now "sanctified," and they may enjoy the blessings and benefits which have traditionally been reserved for a scriptural "family." And who are the immoral, hate-filled, narrow-minded bigots? They are people like you who would dare oppose this "loving, committed family." Every man has become a law unto himself (Jud. 21:25). Values are determined, not by a heavenly Father, but by an earthly feeling, by what we want. Still, though, echoing down the corridors of time, there come the ringing words, "*O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*" (Jer. 10:23). Despite man's cleansing of the outside of the cup and the platter, the searing words of judgment burn in our ears when the Wiseman saith, "*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*" (Prov. 14:12).

Adultery: Redefining Righteousness

As with baptism and tongues, if we can redefine the term, "adultery," we can seek to make righteous that which is an abomination in the sight of God. Adultery, some argue, is simply the breaking of a marriage contract. It is not, they say, sexual sin, or unlawful sexual intercourse with the spouse of another. So, one may repent for having broken his initial marriage vows and keep the second or third wife and not be guilty of the sin of adultery. Presto! The marriage to "*another*" without the cause of fornication is now legitimized and authorized. The participants are as "righteous" as Adam and Eve were in their union. How did these formerly adulterous marriages achieve their righteous connotation and escape a just condemnation? Simple. "Adultery" was simply redefined. It is the same way a Catholic justifies his sprinkling, a Christian Church preacher authorizes his piano, and a Pentecostal verifies his "tongues." Change the meaning of the terms, and righteousness has been redefined.

Never mind that Jesus said that to look and lust was to commit "*adultery*" in one's heart (Matt. 5:28). (Did Jesus mean by "*adultery*" that one was merely tempted to break a marriage contract, or did he mean that one was contemplating sexual sin?) Forget the woman who was "*taken in adultery in the very act*" (Jn. 8:3). (Was she caught in the act of breaking a contract, or in sexual sin?) Ignore the expression describing those who have "*eyes full of adultery*" (2 Pet. 2:14). (Were they only interested in getting a divorce, or were they intent on sexual sin?) Dismiss the fact that God will judge adulterers, those who have "*defiled*" the marriage bed (Heb. 13:4). (Will he judge those who have simply broken a marital vow, or will he condemn those who were guilty of sexual sin?)

Redefining Local Church Autonomy

Local church autonomy! How precious is the concept to those who love the truth, and most especially to those who have come through a long and prolonged fight to maintain it. However, one may wrest and twist the principle of "church autonomy" to make it include items that do not belong. When gospel preachers are criticized and forbidden to preach the whole counsel of God regarding any Bible subject, lest they be guilty of violating local church autonomy, righteousness has been redefined. When gospel preachers refuse to preach the whole counsel of God on any Bible subject, and declare that they will not do so lest they violate local church autonomy, something is rotten up the creek. What has transpired? (1) A truly Biblical doctrine has been wrested and redefined; (2) The Spirit has been quenched (1 Thess. 5:19); (3) The word of God has not been allowed to have "free