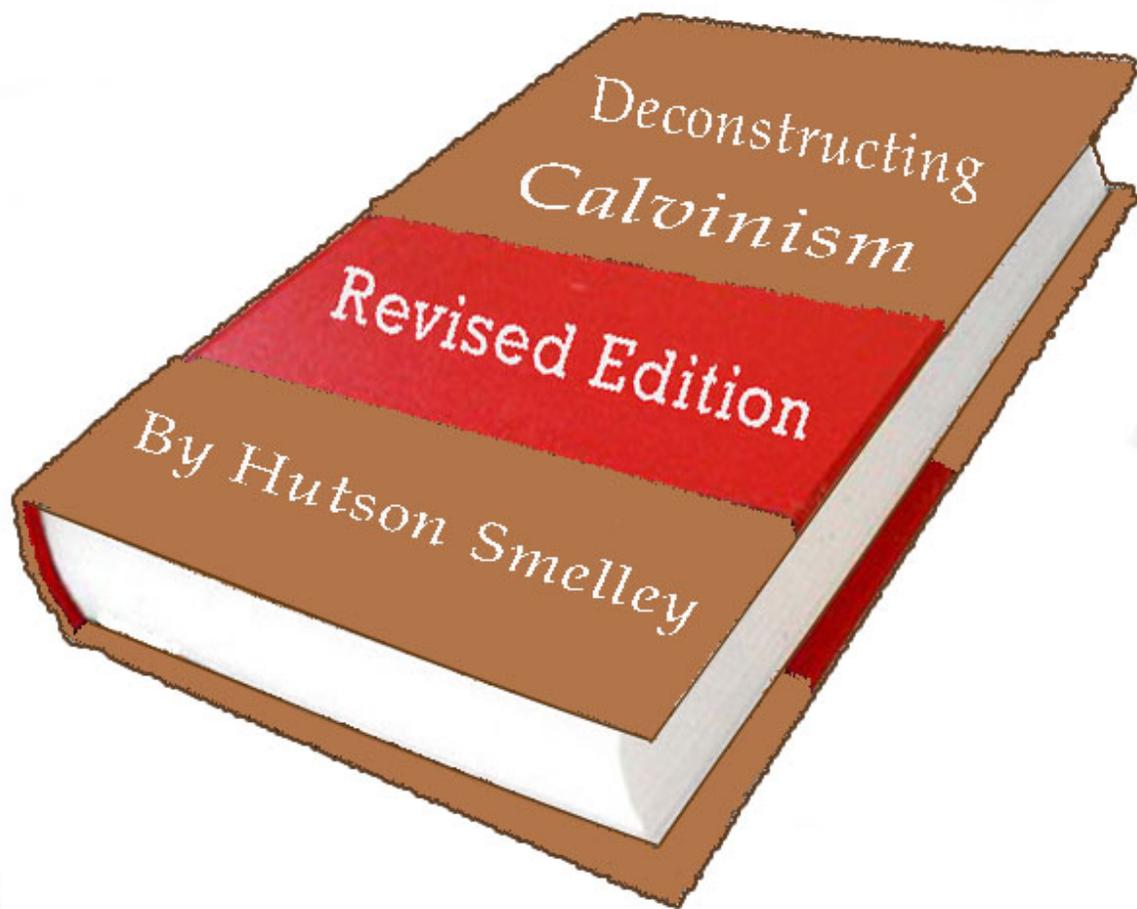


BOOK REVIEW
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By Dave Weeks

Book Review of *Deconstructing Calvinism* by Hutson Smelley 1-13-2015

The question has been asked many times: "Why are there so many different beliefs and denominations?" Someone wisely answered, "Because not everyone that believes in God and reads the Bible has the same rules for interpreting it."

I have given Smelley's book a very high rating because he seeks to present the facts based on the rules of hermeneutics (the science of Bible interpretation) and the rules of law (sub-miscible evidence). In putting Calvinism on trial, he simply asks you, the jury, to examine the evidence. In mentioning his degrees, he alludes to the fact that he is qualified to respond to those who propagate Calvinism and Reformed doctrine.

In a courtroom, all evidence that is presented must comply with the rules of law otherwise, it is deemed inadmissible. Smelley states his position from the very beginning, when he speaks of Calvinism as being outside *the hermeneutical circle*. He demonstrates decisively how proof-texts are used in presenting Reformed doctrine that violates the context, harmony, and grammatical rules of hermeneutics. The hermeneutical rules act like referees on a football field. They drop flags on plays when anyone commits a rules violation. It doesn't matter whether they are defense or offense, Calvinist or non-Calvinist. If one does not abide by the referees decisions, they are removed from the game, and so it is in theological discussions. Like many people watching a football game, folks reading theological dialogues like these are not aware of all the rules that govern the rendering of Scripture.

In Matthew Chapter 4, Jesus Christ Himself used the context rule and the harmony rule when rebuking Satan for misinterpreting God's Word. 2 Timothy 2:15 compels those who preach and teach Scripture to *study to show themselves approved onto God rightly dividing the Word of truth*.

One fine example of Smelley's giving evidence of a doctrinal error is in the following text. In Ephesians 2:8 he proves that faith, in this verse, is not the gift of God as Calvinists contend. In their rendering of this verse, Reformed doctrine proposes that faith is a gift because man is not capable of believing by his own volition. A follower of Calvinism and Reformed doctrine is led to believe that the free will of man relieves God of His sovereignty. The truth is that the sovereignty of God will never be altered by any act of man's God-given free will.

The Calvinist view of Ephesians 2:8 is a violation of a grammatical rule of hermeneutics. Before we examine that, let's ask a question: What is faith? The answer is twofold. First, *saving faith* is an act of the human heart generated by trust. It is subjective and abstract. God, in all His mighty and gracious acts, has proven that He is trustworthy; therefore, it is His will that we trust Him. *Unbelief*, or the lack of faith, is an act of the human heart that is self-centered and generated by pride or deception. Second, faith is objective and concrete. One contends for the faith (doctrinal faith) as a system of religious beliefs. How does one get faith? The answer is quite clear: Romans 10:17 *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Both saving faith and doctrinal faith come from hearing the Word of God preached and taught.

Now let's take a look at Ephesians 2:8 and eliminate the confusion. *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:* The confusion begins when one reads verse 8 and assumes that faith is the gift of God, which is a syntactical impossibility. What does that mean? The problem exists in the gender of *faith* and *that*. The common error is to match the antecedent for the pronoun *that* with *faith*. This is not possible because *faith* is of a feminine gender and *that* is in the neuter gender. In Greek, the pronoun and antecedent genders must match. Typically there are three points of view here: conjectural, conceptual, and contextual. Those of the *conjectural point of view* accept this rendering without grammatical support—they just believe faith is the gift of God because someone else has said it. Those of the *conceptual view* reject that faith is the gift of God and accept salvation as the conceptual antecedent for *that*. Those of the *contextual view* also reject that faith is the gift of God in verse 8 and believe that *mercy* in verse 4 is the neuter antecedent for the neuter *that* in verse 8.

Hats off to Hutson Smelley! He does a good job by quoting authorities who have put in print what Calvinist and Reformed people accept as truth. He also does a good job at putting Scripture before the hermeneutical referees, giving the jurors an opportunity to look at the “replays” with the rules in focus. Referees applying the rules, without bias, on both side of the scrimmage line is what all spectators desire the most. This is what I liked best about *Deconstructing Calvinism*.

Dave Weeks, Author of *CHECKMATE for Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses*

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Pentecostalism, True or False?

Why is Pentecostalism considered to be heretical by most fundamental Born-again Christians? It is because the partial, revelational gifts ceased when the Bible (that which would be perfect or complete) was completed. It is because of the Pentecostal's belief that the canon of Scripture was not completed about A.D. 98 when the Apostle John finished the book of Revelation. Therefore, they believe that the supernatural, temporary gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues are still valid for the church today.

Any interpretation of Scripture can be tested hermeneutically to determine whether it is right or wrong or true or false. When their teaching about tongues is put to the test, it is outside of the hermeneutical circle. This circle consists of eight of the hermeneutical principles that govern anyone who attempts to interpret Scripture and rightly divide it.

Hermeneutical principles are the rules that govern how any written text is to be understood. When applied to Scripture, these rules preserve the authority of God's Word and expose the errors of those who may not know them and apply them.

1. Context Principle - The applicable meaning of a word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter, or book of the Bible is taken from its circumstances and conditions which surround it; i.e., in John 10:30 why did Jesus say that He and the Father are one?

2. Harmony Principle - A truth that is God given will always be in harmony with the whole of God's Word; i.e., Gen. 3:21 Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

3. Language Principle - The awareness of which language is being used in the verse, i.e., literal, figurative, or symbolic and the grammatical functions that apply to each part of speech. John 8:58 Jesus said, Before Abraham was, I am. John 10:9 I am the door... Rev. 8:6 And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. Trumpet: symbol for judgment.

4. Grammar Principle - Every verse of Scripture must be interpreted in agreement with its grammatical structure.

5. Double Reference Principle - A statement that has more than one application or fulfillment, i.e., Ps 22:1 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Matt 27:46

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

6. First Reference Principle - Sets forth a truth at its first usage that is consistent throughout the whole Bible, i.e., Gen. 2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

7. Progressive Revelation Principle - Is a truth that requires additional information to make it clear, i.e., Gen. 3:15; And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Isa. 7:14 & 9:6; Matt. 1:21; Rev. 1:7-8.

8. Main Revelation Principle - Is a book, chapter or verse where a certain truth is fully revealed, i.e., 1 Cor. 15, The Resurrection; vs. 4 ...he [Jesus Christ] rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

1Cor 15:12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?

1Co 15:17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.

1Cor 15:35 But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? 36 Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: Joh 12:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

1Cor 15:50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

Of these three versus listed below, the second **that** in verse 10, proves the case hermeneutically. Let's take a look!

1 Corinthians 13:8-10

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be **tongues**, they **shall cease**; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when **that** which is perfect [this word means complete] is come, then **that which is in part** [the partial gifts of tongues, knowledge, and prophecies] shall be done away.

Verse 10 confirms the previous statement made in verse 8 which says that prophecies, tongues, and knowledge are temporary and would disappear when God completed His full revelation of His Word.

All of the other variant teachings of Pentecostalism can be tested in the same manner to demonstrate their lack of hermeneutical soundness.

When a Pentecostal says that tongues “is in the book,” just remember this:
Judas went out and hung himself. Do thou likewise. And what thou doeth, do quickly.

These last three statements are also Bible based, but they are not contextually based. Without the rules of hermeneutics one can make the Bible say anything he wants it to say. To see the Lord Jesus using these rules, look at Matthew 4 where the devil said, “It is written.” — Another words, it’s in the Book.

Matthew 4:1-10

1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5 Then **the devil** taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

6 And **saith** unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for **it is written** [*it’s in the Book*], He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

The Lord used the context and harmony rules to correct the devil’s false interpretation of Scripture and laid the foundation for *rightly dividing the word of truth*.

2Timothy 2:15

15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Those who fail to keep this command and teach others their own views of God's Word will be the least in the Kingdom of God, that is, if they are truly born-again, they will be least.

Matthew 5:19

19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.