



## WHY IT IS PERFECTLY OK TO CALL HERETICAL PRETERISTS NAUGHTY NAMES

By Dr. Dan Trotter

I was recently taken aback when I discovered that a heretical preterist that I knew decided not to attend the annual Southern House Church Conference that I help sponsor, because I had told him via email that he was "gangrenous". I thought to myself, how could I, the meek, mild, gentle, wimpy, Clark-Kentish Dan Trotter have ever said something that bad about anyone? Four days later I had a flash: I was applying to my full preterist correspondent one of the same terms that Paul had applied to the heretical preterists of his day. Let me quote the words of the inspired apostle: "and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place... (2 Tim 2:17,18a)" When I realized I had apostolic precedent, I immediately felt better about my rhetorical intemperance. In fact, what I said about heretical preterists was positively mild in comparison with what Paul said about the ancient hyperpreterists: he called them blasphemers (I Tim 1:20), he said they had rejected their faith (I Tim 1:19), they had rejected a good conscience (I Tim 1:19), they had shipwrecked their faith (I Tim 1:19), he handed them over to Satan (I Tim 1:20), he called them vain and profane babblers (II Tim 2:16), he said they were ungodly (II Tim 2:16), he said they had gone astray from the truth (II Tim 2:18), and he said that they were upsetting the faith of Christians (II Tim 2:18).

Now, I dare say if I would apply the aforementioned epithets to a modern day Hymenean, I would hear some variation of the following: "Brother, you're not showing love. This is just a minor dispute about the timing of certain eschatological events." I would respond to this by not only appealing to Paul, but also to Tina Turner: "What's love got to do with this?" "Love" is the first word out of the mouth of someone about to lose a theological argument. If someone dumps a load of horse-patookey into my living room, I'm not going to tell him how much I love him. I am going to request of him in no uncertain terms to shovel the stuff out.

Hyperpreterists, of course, don't like the strictures Paul used against Hymenaeus and Philetus to be used against them, and have gone to great lengths to disassociate themselves from the gangrenous teachings of those two heretics. Heretical preterists have a good deal of trouble doing this, because Hymenaeus and Philetus believed back then exactly what the hyperpreterists believe now: the resurrection of the dead has already occurred. So how do the heretical preterists try to make their case? I am going to lay out their case, and then show you beyond cavil that their case is patently absurd. Once I have done that, I will feel perfectly free in good conscience to end this article by adding some other choice labels to our present day heretical preterists, namely: quasi-gnostic, quasi-manichean, and quasi-liberal.

So, how do the hyperpreterists disassociate themselves from Hymenaeus and Philetus? They do it by trying to argue that Paul was disagreeing with those two, not over the NATURE of the resurrection, but rather, over its TIMING. As we shall see, this is impossible: Paul was upset with Hymenaeus because of Hymenaeus' view of the NATURE of the resurrection. Paul believed in the physical resurrection of the body (Rom 8:23; Phil 3:21; I Cor 15:20,23,44,52; I Thess 4:16) and Hymenaeus and Philetus did not believe in a physical resurrection of the body, and so Paul anathematized them.

This is how the heretical preterists argue that the disagreement between Paul and Hymenaeus was over the timing of the resurrection, not its nature. First, they point out (correctly) that Hymenaeus was not arguing that a physical resurrection had already occurred. If the argument were that, all Paul would have to do to refute it would be to point out that all the graves around them had bodies in them, therefore no physical resurrection had occurred. Nobody would be dumb enough to assert such an easily-refuted proposition, and no one would be dumb enough to believe it. Therefore, if Hymenaeus didn't believe that a physical resurrection had already occurred, he must have believed in something else, probably that a spiritual resurrection of some sort had occurred in the heavenlies, which is what the heretical preterists of today believe, and which is what hyperpreterists assert that Paul believed. So, if Hymenaeus believed in a spiritual resurrection, and Paul believed in a spiritual resurrection, Paul couldn't be upset with Hymenaeus over that, and therefore, he had to be upset only over the timing of the resurrection.

There are two ways to proceed here to prove the hyperpreterists wrong. One would be to point out the numerous Scriptures which easily prove that Paul, in

fact, did believe in a physical resurrection, and therefore his disagreement with Hymenaeus was over the nature, not the timing, of the resurrection. This is easy enough to do, and I have done so on a sound recording you can listen to by clicking here: [this link will be available soon] The second way to show that the dispute with Hymenaeus was over the nature of the resurrection, and not its timing, is to grant the hyperpreterists' premise *arguendo*, namely that Paul believed in a spiritual resurrection just like Hymenaeus believed, and that the dispute was thus over the timing of the resurrection, not its nature, and then proceed from there to show that this hyperpreterist argument is absurd on its own premises. We'll do that next.

On hyperpreterist assumptions, the most disagreement that Paul and Hymenaeus could have over timing is approximately forty years. Paul's view of timing would be governed by Jesus' words in the Olivet Discourse, in which Jesus said that "this generation" would not pass away until "all these things" previously referred to had taken place (Mt 24:34), one of which was Jesus' "coming" (Mt 24:27,30). Now, Jesus' "coming" is intimately associated with the resurrection. This can be seen in such verses as I Cor 15:23 "But each [are resurrected] in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His COMING." Also, I Thess 4:15 (cf. v.17): "...we who are alive and remain until the COMING of the Lord will not precede [in resurrection] those who have fallen asleep." Now, if Jesus' coming was within one generation of when Jesus spoke, and if the resurrection of the dead occurred at Jesus' coming, therefore the resurrection was also within one generation of when Jesus spoke (on hyperpreterist assumptions). If Jesus spoke around A.D. 30, and a generation is roughly forty years, then the resurrection of the dead (again, on hyperpreterist assumptions) would be around AD 70. This is when Paul would be expecting the coming of Jesus, and the associated resurrection of the just and the unjust (again, granting the hyperpreterists their premises).

If Paul was expecting the resurrection around AD 70, how did Hymenaeus time the resurrection? At the time Paul wrote II Timothy (mid sixties), Hymenaeus believed that the resurrection had "already" come. The earliest that the resurrection could logically be thought by Hymenaeus to have occurred would be the instant after Jesus had returned to heaven. This is so because, Jesus could not have "come" from heaven and caused the resurrection, unless he had first gone to heaven. So the earliest date that Hymenaeus could have possibly taught that the resurrection had occurred is the date that Jesus ascended, which is approximately A.D. 30, which is the date the majority of scholars assign to Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. And now we compare Paul's view of the

timing of the resurrection, with Hymenaeus's view of the timing of the resurrection, so we can get a feel for the great, burning controversy that caused Paul to get himself all bent out of shape, and which caused him to label Hymenaeus and Philetus blasphemous, gangrenous, faith-shipwrecked, and consigned to Satan. Paul's view: A.D. 70. Hymenaeus's view (at the max): A.D. 30. The difference? A whopping forty years. FORTY YEARS!!!! And for that, Paul is going to send these guys to hell? For forty years? PUH-LEEZE!! If anyone reading this believes that, please email me, so I can show you some great oceanfront property in Arizona I want to sell you.

So, if the dispute between Paul and Hymenaeus can't be over the TIMING of the resurrection as the heretical preterists so foolishly allege, then that leaves only one option for the subject of the dispute, namely, the NATURE of the resurrection. Paul believed in the physical resurrection, just as scadzillions of Christians through the millennia have believed. Hymenaeus didn't believe in a physical resurrection, and that's why Paul was so upset with him and his friends.

The heretical preterists often counter the assertion that they are Hymeneans by pointing out that, although they are claiming the resurrection has already come, as did the Hymeneans, they are different than the Hymeneans, in this one respect: the hyperpreterists are making their claim that the resurrection already happened POST- A.D. 70, whereas Hymenaeus and friends were making their identical claim PRE- A.D. 70. The hyperpreterists then say: see, Hymenaeus was wrong, because, indeed, when Hymenaeus made the claim, in fact, the resurrection hadn't occurred yet (because they made the claim pre- A.D. 70), but when we full preterists make the claim today, we are perfectly correct in saying the resurrection has already occurred, because it indeed has already occurred, in A.D. 70. This is typical of the slick rhetorical tricks heretical preterists like to use. The reader will notice that the logic I've given above pierces their buncombe. That the heretical preterists (given their premises) are right about the timing of the resurrection, and that the ancient Hymenaeans were wrong about the timing of the resurrection, is absolutely irrelevant to Paul' anger and condemnation of Hymenaeus and company. Paul could not have possibly gotten that upset over a few decades worth of difference in timing between himself and Hymenaeus. What he was upset about was that in saying that the resurrection had already come, Hymenaeus was also saying that there wasn't going to be another one, which sent Paul ballistic, which sends me ballistic, and which ought to get you pretty riled up, too.

I should point out here that there is another possible way to analyze the controversy between Paul and Hymenaeus, which, however, still leaves the heretical preterists in trouble. I take this argument from Jonathan Seariah's *The End of All Things*, p. 158. This argument assumes that the controversy between Paul and Hymenaeus was not over timing (impossible, as we've seen above), but it also assumes that Paul and Hymenaeus weren't disagreeing over the nature of the resurrection either. Says Seariah, Hymenaeus was referring to the events recorded in Mt 27:52-53 when he says the resurrection already occurred. Those verses say that, about the time of Jesus' resurrection, "the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many." Therefore, on Seariah's view, Hymenaeus agreed with Paul that the resurrection of the saints was a physical one, but he disagreed with Paul concerning the extent of the resurrection. Hymenaeus believed that those few that were raised at Jesus' crucifixion were all that were ever going to be resurrected. The rest of Christendom were going to have their bodies rot in the graves. On the contrary, Paul believed that all the rest of the believers would be raised (physically) at the last day. One will immediately discern that on this view, the hyperpreterists are still at odds with Paul: Paul believes in a physical resurrection of a believer's body, and he is upset with Hymenaeus, who, like the heretical preterists, does NOT believe in a physical resurrection of (the great majority of) believers' bodies. Seariah's view is perfectly plausible, but I like the argumentation I used earlier to crumple the heretical preterists' position. I like it better because, by assuming the hyperpreterists' premises, and showing that their conclusions aren't internally consistent, one doesn't have to argue over whether Hymenaeus was referring to Mt 27:52-53 or not.

I want to note here that, having seen that the Hymeneans were preaching the same thing the heretical preterists preach today, many will still attempt to let today's hyperpreterists off the hook by distinguishing the heretical preterists from the Hymeneans on the basis of their persons, since their theology can't be distinguished. It is said that Paul was speaking against non-believing heretics, whereas, even though the hyperpreterists are preaching heretical doctrine, they themselves are believers, and therefore we should treat them less harshly than Paul dealt with Hymenaeus. This, of course, is a classical *ad hominem* argument. Just as it is difficult to defend the truth of the existence of charismatic gifts in the church today because of all the crazy things charismatics say and do, it is equally difficult to attack the heresy of a hyperpreterist who does works of tender love and mercy. So why am I so presumptive to do so?

First, let me point out that it is an unproved assumption that the Hymeneans that Paul attacked were unsaved. In the long history of doctrine, there have been a lot of believers who have believed crazy things. Hymenaeus and Philetus could very well have been the first in a long line of believers in Christ who also believed heretical doctrines. This is especially true if Hymenaeus, when he said the resurrection had already come, was referring to the first-fruits resurrection that happened at Jesus' resurrection. A person who believed this would probably be a believer. And if it be said that if Hymenaeus were preaching a non-physical spiritual resurrection, and therefore he couldn't have been a believer, all I need to do is point out that present-day hyperpreterist Hymenaeans do the same thing, and they are believers. Therefore, it is perfectly possible, and perhaps likely, that Paul was denouncing fellow believers. But that's besides the point. Paul was concerned about the effect the DOCTRINE was having on his flock. He wasn't on a personal vendetta against Hymenaeus and Philetus. He was concerned about the truth, not about winning a personal battle. If we keep our battle against the heretical preterists on that plane, I don't see why anyone should have reason to complain.

Now that we have established that the heretical preterists' views are just as damnable as were those of Hymenaeus and Philetus, that leaves us in the happy position of being able to say things about the hyperpreterists at least as naughty as Paul did. I hesitate to do that, because I am a Southern American, and my culture drills into us that we are oh so polite, in each and every circumstance. If our neighbors come to visit us with their kids, and the little hellions draw all over the walls with crayons, poop on the carpet, and grab the cat by the tail and smash his head up side the wall, we hang around by the door for a half hour while we wait for them to leave, telling them what a great time we had, and would they please come back and see us some time. I would like to burst through my cultural limitations and bluntly hang a few choice epithets on the heretical preterists.

First of all, they are quasi-gnostic. Why? For two reasons. The first is that they don't believe the physical body, or the physical world, is important enough to be redeemed from its physical corruption. The heretical preterists aren't completely gnostic, because they do believe the body was created good, and that it shouldn't be abused with licentiousness, and that it shouldn't be damaged with asceticism. Thank God for small favors.

The second reason the hyperpreterists are quasi-gnostics is that they believe that their full-preterist gnosis has been hidden from the whole Christian

community for two millennia, and that only they have seen the light, starting, I suppose, with James Stuart Russell in the late nineteenth century. The rest of benighted Christendom has missed it. That's the talk of dispensationalists and crazy people. Now, as someone who holds to house church ecclesiology, I am fully aware that a hyperpreterist could level the same charge at me. He could say that since I am in such a small minority, and since hardly anybody sees what I'm doing as the truth, and since I am claiming to have seen the light concerning the church, therefore I am as gnostic as the hyperpreterists. Well, no I'm not. There have been tons of Christians over the ages who have believed as I do about the doctrine of the church. For example, the entire early church up until the fourth century. For example, the Waldensians. How about the biggest church in the world today, the church in China? In fact, there are so many people who have believed the way I do about church, that John Kennedy has written an entire book about them: *The Torch of the Testimony*. But consider heretical preterism: over the long course of church history before James Stuart Russell in the late nineteenth century, who has believed this nonsense? Nobody.

The second naughty name which I apply to the consistently foolish preterists is quasi-manichean. The original Manicheans believed that evil existed coeternally with the good. The hyperpreterist quasi-manicheans, unlike the Manicheans, believe that there was no evil present with God at the beginning. However, like the Manicheans, the heretical preterists believe that from now on, evil will always be here. The physical creation, including our bodies, will never be redeemed from it. How depressing.

Naughty name number three: quasi-liberal. In my mind, there is almost nothing worse than "liberal" that you can call somebody. Whether its politics or religion, the liberal operates from the dark side. Granted, the heretical preterists differ from liberals in some areas. Hyperpreterists believe in the Virgin Birth, the inerrancy of Scripture, the physical resurrection of Jesus, etc. But notice how many beliefs they have in common with theological liberals: (1) no visible return of Jesus, (2) no physical resurrection of the believer, (3) no Judgment Day at the end of the world, (4) the world will go on forever and ever until it peters out, (5) the devil is not active today in the world, and (6) the miraculous is not active today in the church. And what makes the heretical preterists' quasi-liberalism even worse is that they spend hours and hours dinning our ears with the very doctrines that the liberals love. I am convinced that what really motivates the hyperpreterist is not the love of the truth, but the fear of the (divine) supernatural. Heretical preterists are usually highly intelligent rationalists who wouldn't believe a miracle if it happened right in front of their eyes. And incidentally, to call them

highly intelligent is not a compliment. The sleazy lawyers that sprung O.J. Simpson were highly intelligent, too. They had to be: they were defending a guilty client.

Ladies and gentlemen, the heretical preterists have denied the historic Christian faith in its essence. Their doctrine is poison. Stay away from it.