

Sunday, February 3, 2013 – Grace Life School of Theology – *Grace History Project* – Lesson 91  
*O’Hairism! Under the Searchlight of the Word!*

### **Introduction/Review**

- 1920 – “Indianapolis Insight” – J. C. O’Hair accepts a no-water position on baptism for the dispensation of grace.
- 1923 – J. C. O’Hair accepts the pastorate of North Shore Congregational Church.
- 1925 – Harry Bultema begins to question the necessity of water baptism.
- February 1929 – M. R. De Haan leaves the Reformed Church in America and establishes Calvary Undenominational Church.
- January 1930 – O’Hair preaches at the dedication services for De Haan’s new church building.
- February 1930 – O’Hair preaches at De Haan’s fourteen day Bible Conference
- Late 1930/Early 1931 – O’Hair writes *Unscriptural Cathedrals* indicating that he has always believed and taught that the church began at Pentecost.
- December 1931 – O’Hair writes *An Epistle to Mr. Albertus Pieters* indicating that he is still friends with De Haan and that *Unscriptural Cathedrals* was already in print.
- 1939 – The World Wide Grace Testimony is formed.
- 1941 – O’Hair writes *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ* in which he blasts Acts 2 dispensationalism as faulty.
- 1945 – O’Hair writes *The Accuser of the Brethren* in which he states that De Haan knew his position on baptism during the late 1920s and early 1930s and was largely in agreement with him.
- All of this means that the critical decade of change in O’Hair’s thinking was the 1930s. Between 1930/1931 when *Unscriptural Cathedrals* was written and for sure before 1941 when he wrote *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ* or, quite possibly, by 1939 with the founding of The World Wide Grace Testimony, O’Hair’s thinking underwent a monumental shift. Over the next few weeks this is what we are going to attempt to nail down – when did O’Hair begin to change his mind and what did that change look like?

### O'Hairism! (1930)

- The booklet written by W. A. Haggai, Pastor of Brookville Baptist Church in Brookville, Massachusetts and endorsed by David Otis Fuller of Wealthy Street Baptist Temple in Grand Rapids, Michigan titled *O'Hairism! Under the Searchlight of the Word!* first appeared in 1930. According to Google Books and the Online Public Access Catalog (electronic card catalog) the booklet saw four editions. This is also confirmed by the Ph.D. dissertation of Adam O. Christmas, dated May 2011 and titled *An Analysis and Evaluation of the Interpretations of J. C. O'Hair, Cornelius Stam, and Charles Baker Concerning The Origin of the Church, Water Baptism, and the Commission of the Church.*
- The original publication date of 1930 is also confirmed by the fact that Haggai quotes or makes reference at least eight times to O'Hair's *The Great Blunder of the Church*. As we saw in the previous lesson, *The Great Blunder of the Church* is advertised in the back of *Unscriptural Cathedrals*. We further know from O'Hair's *An Epistle to Mr. Albertus Pieters* which is dated December 1, 1931 that *Unscriptural Cathedrals* was already in print when Mr. Pieters was addressed. In addition to *The Great Blunder of the Church*, Pastor Haggai also cites from O'Hair's *Seven Questions About Water Baptism* which is advertised for sale in *Have Ye Received The Holy Spirit Since Ye Believed?* which clearly dates from January 1, 1929.
- For the sake of accuracy, we should also note that *The Great Blunder of the Church* also appears to have experienced a major revision after O'Hair changed his dispensational views. First, we have in front of us a copy of *The Great Blunder of the Church* that contains advertisements for the entire *Bible Study for Bereans* magazine from August 1935 to July 1936 and August 1936 through July 1937. At the very least this proves that *The Great Blunder of the Church* was reprinted at some point after its initial release. This of course proves a second printing but not necessarily a major revision. Our reasons for arguing that *The Great Blunder of the Church* underwent a major revision are as follows: when one compares the quotations from *The Great Blunder* made by Haggai in *O'Hairism*, they do not match. For example, on page twenty six of *O'Hairism*, Haggai quotes the following from page 45 of *The Great Blunder*, "After that time (Acts 28:28) he never again became a Jew to the Jews or sanctioned any of the practices of Judaism." These words do not appear, however, on page 45 of the later copy of *The Great Blunder* that we have before us. In addition, we downloaded the PDF version of *The Great Blunder* from the Online O'Hair Library and searched the document in vain for the exact quotes that Haggai was attributing to O'Hair. This can mean only one of two things: 1) Haggai misquoted and misrepresented O'Hair from the very beginning which seems unlikely, 2) O'Hair later substantially revised the work and then reprinted it.
- The copy that the *Grace History Project* possesses is not a first edition because it makes reference to an article written by "the late President of Moody Bible Institute and Editor-in-Chief of the *Moody Monthly*, Dr. James M. Gray." Since James M. Gray died on September 21, 1935 our edition must have been written subsequent to his death. Therefore, it must date from at least October 1935. After examining the document, the *Grace History Project* believes that whatever

differences exist between the four editions of *O'Hairism* reside in the introductory material not in the main body of the document.

- The copy in front of us contains three sections before the main text of the document begins. These three sections include:
  - “Introduction” by David Otis Fuller endorsing the booklet.
  - “A Word of Explanation by the Author” i.e. Haggai
  - “What is O'Hairism?” a section comprised largely of allusions to Dr. James M. Gray’s February, 1933 article in *Moody Monthly* titled “Dispensationalism Running Wild.”
  
- In Haggai’s portion of the introduction, he states the following about the name of the booklet and why he decided to write it. In addition, it also proves that “Congregational” had already been dropped from the name of O’Hair’s church before 1930.
  - “The Name of this booklet was decided upon after much consideration. Some of the brethren call this erroneous doctrine “Bullingerism” instead of “O’Hairism.” But the latter, in our judgment, is the correct name for two reasons. First, Mr. J. C. O’Hair, pastor of North Shore Church of Chicago, has claimed repeatedly that he did not get this teaching from the books of Mr. Bullinger but from his own study of the Bible.

Secondly, it was Mr. O’Hair who has by books, radio, and meetings done all he could to popularize this error especially in the camp of the Fundamentalists. . .

Mr. J. C. O’Hair felt called of God to refute modern “isms.” But his uncontrolled zeal made him overstep the bounds and he has been propagating a pernicious doctrine which has caused confusion and division among believers.

This paper is written for the sake of those who are honest seekers of the Truth as taught in the Word with the hope that their eyes may be opened to the plain preaching of the Scriptures and their hearts may be warmed by its healing simplicity. For, in my judgment, the greatest evidence of the error of this doctrine is that it insinuates itself into the mind of the adherent and arrogates unto itself the position of “A Key to the Scripture.” Whether the propagator knows it or not, they make the Bible appear worthless unless it is entered into with this “Key.” It is a well-known fact that keys lock as well as open. And my personal experience of this error convinces me that it is a “Key” that locks the Word and does not open it.” (Haggai)
  
- The section of the introduction titled, “What is O’Hairism?” offers the following explanation of the heresy.
  - “O’Hairism is a new garment for the older heresy of “Bullingerism,” “So-called as being purely and solely the innovation (or discovery) of the late Dr. E.W. Bullinger, an

Anglican clergyman of great ability, possessing varied gifts and a penchant for dissecting Holy Scripture. . .

The late president of Moody Bible Institute and Editor-in-Chief of *Moody Monthly*,” Dr. James M. Gray called it “Dispensationalism Running Wild.” (Issue of February, 1933, Page 253)

It teaches that the Church, as the Body of Christ, was revealed to Paul only and not to the rest of the Apostles. It teaches that the Gospel which Peter and the eleven preached was a Gospel of “mixture” and not the “unmixed” Gospel preached by Paul. It teaches that the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts as far as Chap. 28:28 are not for this dispensation, or the church of Christ. It teaches that the Great Commission is not for this dispensation. It teaches that the so-called Prison Epistles namely: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, and these only of Paul’s epistles, are for this dispensation. It teaches that the epistles of James, Peter, and Jude are not for this dispensation. It teaches that “repentance” is not for this dispensation. The Gentiles need not repent, just believe. It teaches that the ordinance of Baptism (and some include the Lord’s Supper also) is not for this dispensation.

- As we have already pointed out above, this section was probably added to one of the later editions to O’Hairism. In a letter dated March 1, 1942 addressed to Judge David Otis Fuller, J. C. O’Hair included some quotations from his own personal correspondence with James M. Gray. According to these quotations, Dr. Gray was not thinking about Pastor O’Hair when he wrote “Dispensationalism Running Wild.”
  - Letter of Dr. James M. Gray to Pastor O’Hair, February 20, 1933: “At Present, however, you will be relieved to learn that in the writing of our editorial “dispensationalism Running Wild,” your name never came into mind, personally, I have not associated you with Bullinger.” (O’Hair, *Judge David Otis Fuller Concerning O’Hairism*)
  - Letter of Dr. James M. Gray to Pastor O’Hair, March 21, 1933: “Yes, I am reading and with much interest your booklet, *Much, Little, No Water?* and although I do not go all the way with you, I regard it as a fine piece of exegesis. Your fault is, if you will forgive me, that you are too intense.” (O’Hair, *Judge David Otis Fuller Concerning O’Hairism*)
  - Letter of Dr. James M. Gray to Pastor O’Hair, March 27, 1933: “Coming now to the question of you teaching about baptism, you are not to be condemned but, contrariwise, commended, if you believe it is the truth. But on the other hand, you should expect opposition from those who do not agree with you and yet whose motive is entitled to equal respect.” (O’Hair, *Judge David Otis Fuller Concerning O’Hairism*)
- As of early 1933, James M. Gray did not associate O’Hair’s views with those of Dr. Bullinger. Any allusion to the writings of James M. Gray in the introduction to *O’Hairism* were added after Dr. Gray’s death in 1935 and thereby cloud the historical context in which *O’Hairism* was

originally written. When the booklet first appeared in 1930, O’Hair was still holding a traditional Acts 2 view about when the church began. It is imperative then that *O’Hairism* be read in its proper historical context. Given these historical factors, *O’Hairism* is a critique of O’Hair’s early thinking before he had even officially abandoned his belief that the church began on Pentecost. Consequently, one needs to read *O’Hairism* with these factors in mind and not infer more into the booklet than what is actually stated.

### **The Pillars of O’Hairism**

- According to Haggai, “there are eight arguments which may be termed as pillars upon which the superstructure of this error rests and with which it stands or falls.” (Haggai, 7)

#### *The First Pillar-Argument is Based Upon Ephesians 3:5*

- Haggai claims that O’Hairism teaches that the mystery of the church was revealed to Paul **only**. Haggai maintains that those who were Apostles before Paul also received the revelation of the mystery.
  - “Mr. O’Hair interprets this verse to mean that the doctrine of the church as the body of Christ composed of Jews and Gentiles on equal ground was a mystery “Hidden from every other dispensation. From Moses, Joshua, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Jonah, Micah, and John the Baptist. And yes, HIDDEN FROM PETER AND THE ELEVEN WHO WERE THE MINISTRY OF THE CIRCUMCISION. . . (Referring to the ending of Eph. 3:5 “Holy Apostles and Prophets,” Haggai states) To whom has it been revealed? O’Hairism’s answer is “To Paul only.” Paul’s answer is, “To His Holy Apostles and Prophets.” Does that include Peter, John, Thomas, Philip, and so on to the last? Certainly. They were his Holy Apostles. Is that all? No. He says, “Prophets” also. Who are these prophets? The word, “Now” in the verse limits us to the Prophets of the Church. There is only one such Prophet named in Acts, namely Agabus (21:10). Can there be anything clearer than this statement? The mystery was not revealed to Paul only, but to all “The Holy Apostles and Prophets.” (Haggai, 8)
- The following five facts are established by Ephesians 3:3-9, according to Haggai.
  - “That the mystery was revealed.
  - It was revealed to the Holy Apostles and Prophets.
  - It was revealed by the Spirit.
  - To Paul was given grace to preach among the Gentiles.
  - Paul received it by a revelation and not through the other Apostles.” (Haggai, 8)

*The Second Pillar-Argument is Based Upon the Difference Between Paul's Ministry and that of Peter and the Eleven*

- On this point, Haggai takes O'Hair to task on his teaching that Peter and Paul were preaching different gospels.
  - “There is a great emphasis in Mr. O’Hair’s books laid upon this difference. He makes much of the statement in Galatians 2:7-9, that unto Paul was “committed the gospel of the uncircumcision.” Let us ask a few questions at this point. Are these two different gospels? Is the difference in subject matter, or in the manner of presentation and the people to whom they preached and wrote? Mr. O’Hair insists that the difference is in the subject matter of the nature of the message. He says: “They (Peter and the Eleven) preach the gospel, but they did not preach the unmixed gospel of grace that Paul afterwards preached to the Gentiles. Their message was a mixture of faith, repentance, national restitution, kingdom baptism, and kingdom prophecies.” (The Great Blunder of the Church, page 41) Again: “He who goes back to Peter’s message will go back to a mixture that is not God’s unmixed truth for the Gentile members of the body of Christ.” (Page 63.)” (Haggai, 9)
- Haggai, seeks to counter O’Hair by quoting Galatians 1:8-9. After quoting the passage, Haggai states:
  - “If Peter’s gospel was another gospel, then it was “accursed.” For we have just quoted from Mr. O’Hair that Peter and the Eleven did not preach “Unmixed gospel of grace that Paul afterward preached,” and that Peter’s message was a “mixture of faith, repentance, national restitution, kingdom baptism, and kingdom prophecies. We ask how, in the name of reason, can a gospel of “mixture” deny the inspiration of the Bible, but they do not put any part of it under a curse as this position would infer.” (Haggai, 9-10)
- Haggai concludes his exposition of the second pillar of O’Hairism by quoting I Corinthians 15:1-11 to prove that Peter and the Eleven had been preaching the same gospel as Paul.
  - “Therefore, whether it were I or they, (Peter and the Eleven) so we preach, and so ye believed.” “We” (Peter and the Eleven) preached the same gospel that Paul preached. And yet, O’Hairism wants you to believe that Peter and the Eleven preach a “mixed gospel.” (Haggai, 10)
- Haggai also cites I Peter 5:12 as further proof that Peter was preaching “the true grace of God” the same as Paul and not a “mixed gospel,” as O’Hair maintains.

*The Third Pillar – Argument is Based on I Corinthians 1:17*

- Haggai argues that Paul’s statement, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel,” should either be understood in an absolute sense or an idiomatic sense. He further suggests

O’Hairism demands an absolute interpretation that then needs to be applied to all similar statements in order for one to be consistent. Haggai references two passages to make his point.

- Matthew 9:13’s quotation of Hosea 6:6 – “the natural conclusion would be that God did not want sacrifices. And if he did not want them He certainly could not have commanded the Children of Israel to offer them.” Yet he clearly does in Leviticus 4 as well as in scores of other passages.
- Jeremiah 7:22-23 – “Shall we interpret this portion in an absolute sense? O’Hairism would force us to do so, and to do so would bring us into the company of the higher critics who have used this very portion to prove that the Mosaic law was not written by Moses, but rather by Hilkiah the priest at the time of Josiah. Of course, Mr. O’Hair does not believe that, but his system of interpretation makes this conclusion inevitable. Again we ask, how can we explain this paradox?” (Haggai, 11-12)
- Haggai explains the paradox by arguing that the form of the expression found in I Corinthians 1:17 is a Hebraic expression.
  - “The answer is very simple and can easily be seen by any humble believer of the Word. This form of expression is strictly Hebraic. “It is using the negative to supply the want of the comparative.” To illustrate: when two principles or matters or ideas are in mind and the speaker wishes to show their relative value, the negative issued of the inferior and the positive of the superior principle matter or idea. So then when the prophet said, and the Lord quoted: “I will have mercy and not sacrifice” was equivalent to saying “mercy is more important than sacrifice. . . (Likewise in the case of Jeremiah) it was the Hebrew way of saying, “It is more important to obey the voice of the Lord than to offer burnt offerings and sacrifices.”” (Haggai, 12-13)
- Therefore, since Paul was a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” he was merely using a Hebraic expression in I Corinthians 1:17 (with a primarily gentile audience?) , according to Haggai.
  - “. . . he (Paul) meant what every humble believer through the centuries has understood him to mean, namely: “preaching the gospel is more important than baptizing.” And the heart of every true Christian responds, “Amen, even so.” Alas, that so many believers had pressed into their hands this “Key” of O’Hairism which has locked to them completely the door into the simple and otherwise easily understood verse of Scripture.” (Haggai, 13)
- Despite Haggai’s claims to the contrary, this is not an “easy” or “simple” explanation of what I Corinthians 1:17 plainly states. Paul was not sent for the purpose of baptizing. This is clearly the direct opposite of what we read in Matthew 28 and Mark 16 with regard to the twelve Apostles.
- Pastor Haggai goes on to offer the following comments on I Corinthians 1:11-17:

- “. . . the substance of what he was saying to them is this: “You are divided according to the different leaders who have ministered to you, and some claim to be the special followers of Christ. We are not interested in having people follow us. We want all to follow Christ. If I had wanted people to follow me, I would have baptized as many people as I could, but I did not. I am more interested in preaching the gospel than in baptizing.” (Haggai, 13-14)
- Lest we be accused of misrepresenting Pastor Haggai, we quote his final three points of corroboration on the third pillar of O’Hairism.
  - 1) “Paul did baptize Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas and perhaps others. For he said, “besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.” Evidently he did not keep a record of those whom he baptized. If we are to understand I Corinthians 1:17 in the absolute sense, then we must conclude that Paul was guilty of doing what the Lord had not sent him to do.
  - 2) In Acts 18:8 we read that “Many of the Corinthians believed, and were baptized” while Paul was there. Here we have “many” baptized. In fact, any humble seeker of the truth will readily see from this verse that all who believed were baptized. Paul baptized some of the “many.” Who baptized the rest? Paul was the only Apostle on the field and the first one to preach the Gospel there. See Romans 15:20. Who, pray tell me, could have taught them about baptism but Paul? Would there have been any baptism if Paul meant I Corinthians in the absolute sense? If Christ had sent him not to baptize, why did he introduce baptism? O’Hairism has no answer to these questions.
  - 3) In John 4:1-2 we have a sidelight on Paul’s experience in Corinth . . . (quotes the verses) According to the Scripture, the Lord did not baptize but His disciples did. In fact, he was prophesied as the One coming to baptism with the Holy Spirit and nothing was said about His water baptism. Yet He baptized and His disciples baptized in His presence. Shall we not draw a parallel between this Scripture and Paul’s experience? Many in Corinth were baptized; Paul’s disciples or companions, for Silas and Timotheus met him at Corinth, Acts 18:5. Yet we can say that he taught them about baptism and had them all baptized, though he himself baptized only a few.” (Haggai, 14-15)
- We will finish our analysis of *O’Hairism! Under the Searchlight of the Word!* in the next lesson.

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Google Books, *O'Hairism!*

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