

## RELIGION PAGE COLUMN

### NO SUCH THING AS A BIBLICAL LITERALIST

By Dean Feldmeyer

A couple of years ago, an eighty-one year old woman named Mary Lambert got fired from her job as a Sunday school teacher at the First Baptist Church in Watertown New York.

According to several news accounts, she had taught in that church for over fifty years but the new pastor, who says that the words in the Bible must be taken literally, fired her because she's a woman.

Did you get that? He fired her because she's a woman.

As rationale, Pastor Timmy LaBouf points to a verse in the First Epistle to Timothy: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent."

Since he insists on interpreting and obeying this verse literally, I'm going to assume that La Bouf believes the same thing about all of the verses in the Bible.

Like Leviticus 11: 10-12 -- "Everything in the waters that does not have fins and scales is detestable to you. Of their flesh you shall not eat." No shrimp or lobster for Pastor LaBouf.

Does he have clothing police at First Baptist who make sure no one wears blended fabrics? Leviticus 19: 19 -- "...nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials."

And what about Leviticus 19: 27 -- "You shall not round off the hair on your temples or shave the edges of your beard." How's that beard coming, Tim?

And I'll bet that church is swamped with undocumented immigrants because those folks take seriously Leviticus 19: 33 -- "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself..."

I suppose that all of the adulterers in the church have been executed. (Leviticus 20: 10) As have the gays. (Leviticus 20:13) And the rebellious and stubborn children are routinely taken to the city gate and stoned to death by the elders of the town, right? (Deuteronomy. 21: 18-21)

And I'll bet Pastor LaBouf's house surely has a parapet on the roof. (Deuteronomy 22: 8)

Whatever a parapet is.

I'd love to ask him what he makes of Galatians 3: 26-28 – "But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian.... There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is *no longer male and female*; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Emphasis mine.)

My point here is that there is no such thing as a Biblical literalist. No one really takes every single word of the Bible literally. We all interpret scripture.

The real question is: What lens do we interpret the Bible through?

Do we interpret God's word through a lens of judgment and condemnation and exclusion? Or do we interpret it through a lens of kindness, acceptance, generosity and love?

**DEAN FELDMEYER IS THE SENIOR PASTOR OF THE WILMINGTON UNITED  
METHODIST CHURCH**