

2007 Proclaimer

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, .. to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord!" - Isa.61:1-2

A teaching and exhortation medium by members of the Carmichael Church of Christ, meeting at 6044 Sutter Ave. Carmichael, CA 95608

Homepages: webs.lanset.com/carmichael and www.preachersnotes.com
(916) 483-9318

ELDERS / EVANGELISTS

Glenn H. Reagan - 721-9464; Ron Stewart - 771-2064; C. L. [Vern] Wilson - 961-6944
<lareagan@yahoo.com> <rstewcrr@lanset.com> <elder@preachersnotes.com>

DEACONS:

Frank Ayers, 966-4979; Bill Kizer, 745-1043; Carl Romine, 773-4402; Rick Rittenhouse, 728-5077;
Bill Schultz, 543-0206; Brad Shuck, 530-677-9474

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The Authority of the Scriptures

by William J. Stewart

As we look about, we see a great number of religious groups. Upon examination of this hoard of "Bible-believing" assemblies, we find very few agree on very little. There are as numerous doctrines preached as there are pulpits to preach from. It would seem to this author that there is a problem. Each of these groups claims for itself that they serve the Lord in "spirit and truth," yet none are able to agree on matters of doctrine. The central problem of this division is a lack of Biblical authority. The apostle Paul pleaded with the brethren at Corinth that they, "...all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (**1 Cor 1:10**) We must endeavour to find this type of unity. It can only be found by understanding our authority in religious matters.

There are various things being used by groups to establish what practices should be performed in and by the church. Many creed books and doctrines of men exist. Councils are established to vote on issues regarding the church. Feeling and emotion are employed to determine what it is we ought to do in the church. Some men have been given special authority, such as the Pope, Society presidents, councils, etc. The Bible seems to have taken a back seat to the desires and doctrines of men.

Paul wrote to young Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (**2 Tim 3:16-17**) Paul made no mention of the need for humanly devised councils, creed books, etc. He found the Word of God to be sufficient for the needs of the church. God has given us all we need to know to properly serve Him, His own inspired word.

Consider the following Scriptures: "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (**Rev 22:18-19**)

"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I commanded you." (**Deut 4:2**)

"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (**Col 3:17**)

The Bible clearly states God's displeasure with those who heed doctrines other than that which is found in His word. Jesus warned His disciples, "...beware of the leaven of the Pharisees..." (**Matt 16:6**) Jesus recognized the false teachings of the Pharisees, and wanted His disciples to avoid such things. Again, He applied a prophecy made by Isaiah to them, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the

commandments of men." (**Matt.15:8-9**) God finds no pleasure in those who nullify His word with man's creeds and doctrines.

Paul, having concern for the Galatian brethren, as they departed from sound doctrine wrote, "...even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." (**Gal 1:8**) Paul indicated that even he, an apostle of Christ could not change one command found within the law of Christ. How dare we attempt to teach anything that is not found therein.

Paul wrote to Timothy warning him that some would depart from sound doctrine. "Preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." (**2 Tim 4:2-4**)

If I were to tell one person my height was 5' 11", and then told another I was 6', I would be pointed out as a liar. Yet, in the religious world today, we have each group saying that God tells them a certain thing to preach and practice from the Scriptures, many of which contradict. What are the various denominations saying of God when they exclaim, "His word means one thing to us, and something else to you." If man tells two different stories, he is considered a liar. Is God a liar? By no means! Paul exclaimed, "...let God be true, but every man a liar..." (**Rom 3:4**) What has happened is that there has been a misinter-

pretation or a misapplication of Scripture, or as in many cases, a complete neglect of council from God.

Let us further consider a truth. We all understand that $2+2=4$. We know that it is not 4.0000001. Anyone who tried to tell us that it was anything but 4, we would consider to be a liar. The conclusion is that truth is an absolute. In mathematics, and we are able to properly apply this law. Yet, when it comes to the Word of God, people set this concept aside. Jesus said, "*Thy word is truth.*" (**Jno 17:17**) How many truths can there be? There is but one truth. Truth is not something which changes meaning from person to person or from group to group. Truth is absolute, consistent, and does not contradict itself. We understand this of mathematics, if only we would realize it of the Word of God.

Can we understand the Bible alike? Certainly, we can. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "*Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*" (**Eph 5:17**) We must understand the will of the Lord. This is done by setting aside pre-conceived ideas, and accepting God's word for what it says. God will judge us, not our preacher. Neither will some church council judge us, but God alone. Paul wrote again to the Ephesians, "*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in you all.*" (**Eph 4:4-6**) Let us find the one body (the church), which belongs to the one Lord (Jesus), as guided by the one faith (the Word of God). [**William J. Stewart**]

R.B. & June Rankin
6907 Gold Oak Lane
Citrus heights, CA 95621
916-728-9342
(Email address on request)

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Jason & Marie Anderson
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Jesus was called “Good Teacher”

There is a story familiar to many that appears in the text of Matthew 19:16-30. A young man comes to Jesus calling Him "Good Teacher" and asking what he needed to do to "have eternal life?"

I have heard this story preached many times and heard it spoken about in several bible studies. Some obvious lessons come forcefully from the example of this text. We see the need for a total devotion to God. Jesus said you cannot serve two masters and obviously this young man was trying to do just that. Indeed this situation shows us exactly what Jesus meant back in Matthew 6, for this young man had to choose between the two and when the choice was made the one he loved more was revealed.

The story shows us that Jesus really means for us to place Him first before everything else. It also reveals the need to rid our lives of things that may keep us from a total devotion unto Christ. In these two thoughts or teachings have been the vast majority of messages I have heard preached from the text. They are good and needed lessons for obviously we need to hear them and understand them. However, there are a few very obvious lessons that I don't hear mentioned often from the text.

Within the conversation is the certainty of eternal life and salvation. For understand the question was about how to receive eternal life. The man knew, or it seems implied that he knew, that Jesus had the knowledge to which this man desired. Hence the fact that there is an eternal life was never in doubt by Jesus or by the one who came questioning. The obvious acceptance of the question and the further discussion should reaffirm the Christian's hope and faith that with Jesus there is eternal life.

Not only is the hope of an eternal life so fervently expressed there are some points regarding that "receiving" element of this eternal life that beg our attention. So much is often said about the thief on the cross. Whole doctrine discourses seem to extend from the thief being the proof text for salvation with no "works" or "deeds" or actions on our part. There are some who claim any "required" deed would inherently give birth to "saving oneself through works" and "negate the grace of God."

Let me ask a simple question - did Jesus ask this young man to save himself through righteous deeds? It seems impossible for the honest student to deny that Jesus said this man had to "keep the commandments." Likewise it will be difficult for those who argue against "religious deeds" to refute Jesus demand that this young man sell all that he had (that's a work, is it not), give to the poor and follow after Him, and yet again we have another action commanded by Jesus. Don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating that we are saved by religious deeds! On the contrary, I believe what is being demonstrated is that faith is not apart from actions and deeds. Furthermore that Jesus requiring actions on our part does not negate that fact that we are saved by the grace of God. James had said we are "not saved by faith only" he also said in James two that he would show his faith by his works.

So let me answer the question I posed in the last paragraph, no I don't believe Jesus asked this young man to "save himself" through "righteous deeds." I believe Jesus was saying you got to put Him first, that means keeping the commandments of God... yes that's what he told this young man and its what He spoken to all of us, "*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.*" (John 4:23) Jesus calls all to hear, believe, confess, repent, be baptized and live faithfully for Him. Doing so is not trying to save oneself apart from grace, instead its loving Jesus and through faith putting Him first in our lives. It is by the grace of God and the work of Jesus on the cross that there is a way of salvation and the ability to be saved, and keeping the things that Jesus has commanded is in accordance with His beautiful saving work. Will we do the things Jesus has put before us, and pick up our cross and follow after Him, or will we go away sorrowful as the young man in the text?