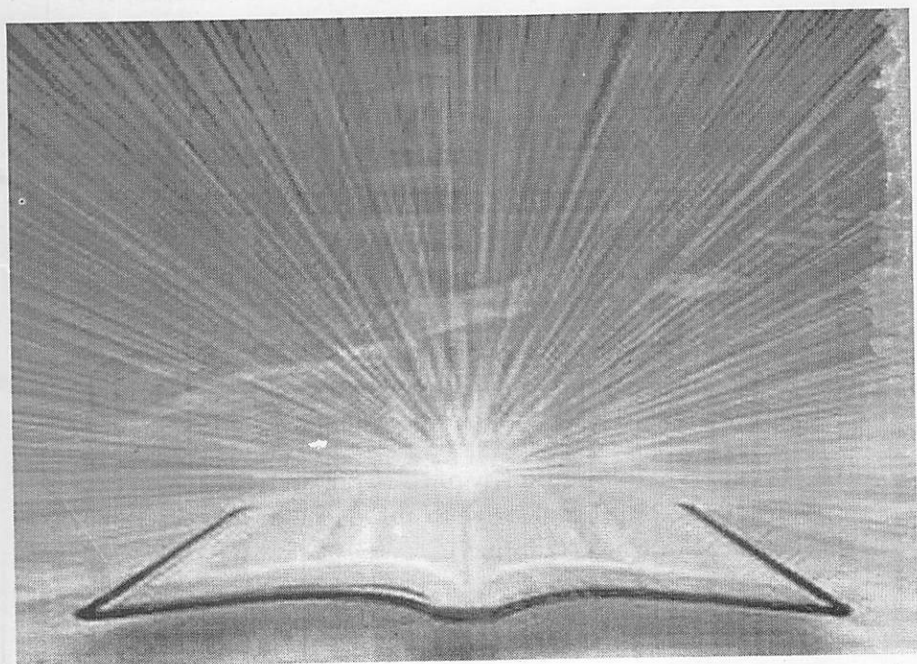


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THE BIBLE TEACHER



Our Plea Let the Truth Prevail

1. That there should be only one church today, as it was in the beginning—Church of Christ—Which Christ Himself built, and about which we all can read in the Bible (Matthew 16:18; Col. 1:18). That congregations of the one church of the Bible everywhere may be known as churches of Christ, as we read at Romans 16:16. That there should be no denominations or sects in the name of the Church. (1 Corinthians 1:10; John 20:20, 21).
2. That there should be only one plan or guideline of salvation, as is revealed and taught in the Bible, followed everywhere. All must believe in Christ, repent of wrong, confess Christ the Son of God, and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-38). Those who obey these commands to be saved are saved by the Lord and He Himself adds the saved ones to His church (Acts 2:47); which is His Spiritual body. (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4).
3. That all followers of Christ, everywhere, should be known as Christians, and Christians only, after His name alone, with no Prefixes or Suffixes, as it was in the beginning. (Acts 4:12; Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). That all other names which exalt and glorify any other name of a man, or a doctrine, or a day or a movement, etc., must be forgotten.
4. That all man-made creed books must be put aside, with other books written by men which contain doctrines and commandments of men, and only the Bible which contains God's inspired message for man must be followed in all spiritual matters. (Matthew 7:21-23; John 12:48).
5. Let us accept the authority of Christ in all religious matters (Matthew 28:18), and strive to abide in the New Testament doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

Church And The Kingdom Are The Same

READING FROM MATTHEW 16:18-19 we observe, Jesus told Peter that He would build His church on the rock, that is, on Peter's confession of Christ as the Son of the living God; and in the same breath Jesus also told Peter that He would give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and that whatever he would bind on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever he would loose on earth would be loosed in heaven. (Of course, this promise was also made to the other apostles, as we read in Matthew 18:18). But in this case, Christ was foretelling that Peter was going to preach the gospel, with the other apostles, first, and that He would be the first one to let people know what they must do to enter the church or the kingdom of Christ. (Acts 2:37-47). He used the word church interchangeably with kingdom.



It is highly noteworthy from the reading above that when Christ made the statement about building His church, He made no difference, whatsoever, between two words "church" and "kingdom." That is, when He said that He would build His church, He also meant that He would establish His kingdom.

True to the promise, when the first gospel sermon was preached on the day of Pentecost, in the city of Jerusalem, about 33 A.D, it was Peter who told those who had become believers in Christ to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. It is also significant

that it was the apostle Peter, again, who told the backsliding Simon what must one do to return to Christ, if one goes back into the world after becoming a Christian. (Acts 8:22).

According to the Bible, those who believed in Christ, repented of their sins and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, were saved, and the Lord added them to the church, which is the body of the saved ones. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:37-47). The Lord has not changed His plan, as He does the same even today. Acts chapter 2 tells us how the church which Christ had promised to build was established.

To the saved ones, who were in the church, the apostle Paul, later wrote, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13,14). What was the apostle saying? He was saying that those who were added to the church, after receiving the forgiveness of sins, were, in fact, put into the kingdom of the Lord. From this we learn that the church of Christ is the kingdom of the Lord, or the kingdom of Christ is the church of the Lord. Both are the same.

Another remarkable passage which could be cited to prove the point is Mark 9:1, wherein Christ said to the apostles: "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." There Christ was assuring His apostles that the kingdom would come during their lifetime. They would not die till they saw the kingdom of God present with power. Has the kingdom come? Surely it has, since it was to come, according to Christ, when the apostles would still be living. There are no apostles living on earth today. They all died almost 2000 years ago. Yet millions of people around the world are still ignorantly parroting "Your kingdom come." When Christ taught that prayer of example to the apostles in Matthew 6, the kingdom had not yet come. But Christ had promised them that during their lifetime the kingdom would come. And it did, as the apostle Paul said to the Christians that they were translated into the kingdom of the Son.

Notice too, according to Christ, the kingdom was to come with power, and the power, according to Acts 1:8 was to come with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit and the power came, as we read in Acts 2:1-4 on the day of Pentecost when the apostles began to preach the gospel, and as the listeners began to ask, "What shall we do?" They were told to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of

sins, and as they did that, the Lord added them to the church, that is, He translated or put them into the kingdom!

Also note, that both Acts 2:38, 47 and Colossians 1:13, 14 talk about the "forgiveness of sins, and on the basis of their receiving the forgiveness of sins, they were added to the church or put into the kingdom; and the forgiveness of sins, which they had received by being baptized into Christ, was possible through the blood of Christ.

Now look at Acts 20:28, as the apostle Paul conversed with the elders of the church at Ephesus, he told them, "to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Here the church of Christ is called the church of God, and the apostle said that God purchased the church with His own blood, stating thereby that those in the church have been redeemed by the blood of God, Jesus Christ.

So we learn that the church of Christ is the church of God and the church of God is the church of Christ. And the same is true when the church is called kingdom. The kingdom of the Son of His love, as we read from Colossians 1:13, is the kingdom of Christ and it is also the kingdom of heaven or God, because both Christ and God are in heaven.

On the day of resurrection and judgment when Christ will appear, His kingdom or the church will be lifted up to meet with Him in the air, as we read in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and as Christ receives His kingdom, He will deliver the kingdom to the Father, so the earthly will become heavenly. (1 Corinthians 15:24).

Yet, on earth, in the church could be both good and bad people, as God sees them. Speaking about the kingdom heavenly, the apostle John wrote in Revelation 21:27, "But there shall by no means enter in anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

While He was on earth, Christ warned: "The Son of man will send out His angels, and they will gather OUT OF THE KINGDOM all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:41,42; also read 47-50).

The truth of the matter is that God's kingdom exists today in the form of His church. Those who are in the blood bought church have the conditional assurance that if they will remain faithful to Him until death, they will receive the crown of life, the eternal life in heaven.



YOUR TEMPERATURE

J.C. Choate

SAY YOU HAVE OBEYED the gospel; you are a member of the Lord's church; you are a Christian, a child of God? All of that is good, but the big question is: Are you faithful to your calling? Now there's one way of finding out and that is by taking your temperature, spiritually

speaking. Upon one occasion Christ spoke unto the church of the Laodiceans in this manner: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." (Rev. 3:15,16). What the Lord had to say to the Laodiceans not only applied to them but it would be well for you to consider that statement.

The Lord knew the condition of the Laodiceans. As stated, he knew their works, whether good or bad. In such a case Christ had the power to look upon the hearts of those involved that he might know their thoughts as well as their works. This suggests that they could not hide their state from the Lord even though they may have wanted to. It should also teach you that it is impossible for anyone to hide from him. All that you say or do is open before the Lord.

In the next place, Christ knew that the Laodiceans were neither hot nor cold. This congregation was made up of an indifferent group of people they were not necessarily for the Lord and neither were they necessarily opposed to him. In other words, they seemed to have the idea that they could stay in the middle of the road. Now my friend, the Lord knows whether you are hot or cold. Yes, he knows if you are walking along holding to him with one hand and holding the Devil with the other. I tell you, he knows you.

We now observe that the Lord knew the Laodiceans to be a lukewarm people. And the very fact, they were neither hot nor cold meant only one thing—lukewarmness. The same is true with water. If it is neither hot nor cold it can be only one thing—lukewarm. Well, my friend, if you are neither hot nor cold you must be lukewarm.

If the Lord had his way about the people of Laodicea he would have had them to be hot or cold. Christ then, by his own acknowledgment, had rather have a person altogether for him or altogether against him, for he hates hypocrisy. But these people were neither, thus leaving them lukewarm. Lukewarmness is very

distasteful even when it comes to drinking water. In the case of water, it is always better cold or hot. However, if one takes a mouthful of lukewarm water it makes him want to spit it out. The same is true with the Lord when it comes to lukewarm Christians. Therefore, he said unto those who were lukewarm, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." My friend, if you are lukewarm the Lord will treat you in like manner. As stated, there is hardly anything more distasteful than lukewarmness.

The Lord took the temperature of the Laodiceans and found them to be lukewarm. What about your temperature? Have you taken it lately? Why not do it right now by beginning with:

1. Cold. Friend, have you drifted away from the Lord altogether? If you have grown cold you need to return to the saviour and resolve ever to stay by his side.

2. Lukewarm. Dear one, have you become indifferent with your duties and responsibilities? You should realize that if you are in this state the Lord will spue you out of his mouth. To be lukewarm is to be lost. Repent, confess your faults, and pray to God that you may be for given.

3. Hot. Beloved, are you daily serving the Lord? If you are, more power to you. Always remain on the Lord's side and he'll reward you with life, and life everlasting.

Now I trust you have taken your temperature according to God's thermometer—the Holy Bible. If you have, where do you stand? If your temperature is not what it should be, correct it scripturally. And yet, if it is where it should be according to the will of God, then do all that is within you to keep it that way. Remember, God's thermometer never lies.

THE MOUTH OF GOD

Bret Carter

DAVID EXECUTED A YOUNG man needlessly. The young man was an Amalekite who did himself in by lying. Although King Saul had committed suicide, the young man reported to David that he himself had actually killed the king, thinking he would be praised for dispatching David's enemy.

On the contrary, David was not happy: "Your blood is on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed'" (2 Samuel 1:16). David ordered his men to kill the young man immediately.

It was the mouth. Although, in this case, it failed to represent the truth, the mouth testified against the young man, resulting in his early death. It was assumed that the young man's mouth told it like it was.

This kind of thinking is also found in the trial of Jesus. His words were truth, but that truth was offensive enough to those hearing Him that it resulted in His death. His accusers made it clear why they believed this case was closed: "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth" (Luke 22:71).

It wasn't because of the look in His eyes or His body language. It was His mouth. Those present believed that the mouth was an accurate representative of a person.

A Reliable System

For the most part, a man has control over his mouth. There are occasions when his mouth might betray him and hundreds of ways for his words to get tangled into meaningless or embarrassing phrases. We can all look back on other times and cringe, remembering how our anger or ignorance led us to say something foolish.

However, the majority of the time our mouths faithfully express what we want them to. If the mouth consistently failed in this respect, we would find another way of expressing ourselves.

Jesus indicated the mouth was more than suitable for measuring a person: "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart" (Luke 6:45). The mouth is not just a device that produces words; it is an audible version of the heart.'

Because the mouth speaks for the person, it carries a certain amount of authority. If this is true for man, this is likely to be also true for God. Anyone verified as God's "mouth" would accurately present the words of God's heart and mind. This means that any "mouth" of God would also carry authority.

It is safe to assume that any person who served as the mouth of God would have some reliability—at the very least, the same degree of reliability we count on when using our own mouths. Fashioned by the divine power of God (who uses even the free will of His creation to shape His plans), one might even conclude that when it comes to the mouth of God, regardless of human flaws, nothing will be tangled up or confused. God does not stutter.

There were several times when God assured the reader of His words that what had been written was an accurate delivery of what He wanted to say. One way of “sealing” the words to be delivered was by pointing out the fact it came from His own mouth. The message was sealed with the phrase “the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 1:20; 58:14; Micah 4:4). This implied that whoever received what had been spoken would treat the message as authority.

Words and Actions

In fact, the idea was that you better not interfere with what had come from God's mouth. His Word, as delivered, was so authoritative that it would be unwise to stand in its way. “So will My Word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). When God spoke, it was expected that things would happen. Just as with us, God's mouth was expected to be strongly associated with His actions.

When a man's words do not match his actions, this usually means his integrity is in question. Such a conflict is a symptom of duplicity. The hands should be in correlation with the mouth. Solomon saw this integrity of words and action in God. In his prayer, Solomon said to God: “That which You have promised him; indeed You have spoken with Your mouth and have fulfilled it with Your hand as it is this day” (1 Kings 8:24). When it comes to people, words and actions do not always match, but when it comes to God, the unity of His purpose through what He says and what He does is flawless.

Destructive and Creative

The mouth of God is associated with power and authority—the kind that defies any opposition. Several passages address this in stark images. Sometimes, it is expressed through the metaphor of fire: “His breath kindles coals, and a flame goes forth from His mouth” (Job 41:21). “Smoke went up out of His nostrils, and fire from His mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it” (Psalm 18:8). The mouth of God is potentially destructive, depending on the nature of those who hear it: “Behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire and this people wood, and it will consume them” (Jeremiah 5:14). Being on the flammable end of this analogy, we would all do well to take this description to heart.

In some places, the images are even more violent: “Therefore I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth” (Hosea 6:5). The same violent parallel is

described in the New Testament as well: "Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming" (2 Thessalonians 2:8). After this, the almost surreal imagery found toward the end of God's Word is no surprise: "Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth" (Revelation 2:16). To oppose such authority would be foolish and dangerous. There is no indication in Scripture that the mouth of God -whoever or whatever might have been representing it—produced anything less than this kind of authority.

The destructive nature of this authority is also accompanied by its power to create. When God created the universe out of nothing, God chose to speak it into existence: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host" (Psalm 33:6).

Just as the words from the mouth of God can mean destruction for those who oppose Him, His words are also nothing less than life for those who turn to Him. Job realized this: "I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). One way or the other, the mouth of God determines our survival.

Authorized Words

If His hearers are so dependent on His words, He would certainly make sure that any vessel of delivery He selected would be a secure one. God chose specific people to be His mouth, and at no point did He ever indicate they would be iffy messengers:

"I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die" (Deuteronomy 18:18-20).

The message was so important that any tampering with it by even the messenger himself would cost him his life. To speak on behalf of God without having His full endorsement was a serious offense.

All in all, God apparently believed that this method of communication was more than suitable. "I have put My words in

your mouth" (Isaiah 51:16). "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth" (Jeremiah 1:9). "God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time" (Acts 3:21). As far as He was concerned, His "mouth" would say only what He wanted to say.

Not everyone was qualified for such an honor. Anyone who showed lack of respect for God's words was rejected: "But to the wicked God says, 'What right have you to tell of My statutes and to take My covenant in your mouth?' For you hate discipline and you cast My words behind you" (Psalm 50:16-17). There was a clear distinction between the one who was authorized to speak as the mouth of God and those who were speaking from their own minds: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:16).

The Bible contains the words as delivered by the mouth of God. And we can be confident that the words of God have survived any man-made complications. Even when God allowed Job's friends to express freely their deep lack of wisdom, any non-truth was clearly identified as such before the book of Job was brought to a close (Job 42:7-8). And if God chose someone as His mouth, you can rest assured that this appointed person spoke only what God wanted him to speak.

Anything that came from the "mouth" of God was untainted by inner conflict or outside influence: "All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverted in them" (Proverbs 8:8). No matter the general turmoil of the world, when God spoke, His message was delivered loud and clear.

Latent Effects of Higher Criticism in Churches of Christ

Dan R. Owen

THE STUDY OF THE BIBLE for the past 300 years has been radically impacted by the rise of rational and empirical methods. During this period, people began to question the veracity of the Bible, especially when it dealt with matters that cannot be explained naturally or proved empirically. What we call "higher criticism" in this article is an approach to the Bible in which one assumes that everything must have a natural, as opposed to a supernatural, explanation. Under this approach to Scripture, not only were all the

biblical claims of divine inspiration dismissed as ancient fantasy, but , all supernatural events recorded in the Bible were relegated to the categories of myth and legend. The result of such an approach is a completely different concept of the nature and function of Scripture than has traditionally shaped the churches of Christ.

Theologians who operated with these naturalistic assumptions asked how the Bible really originated, if not by divine inspiration. Among these were Julius Wellhausen, K.H. Graf and Abraham Kuenen, who developed and popularized their famous documentary hypothesis about the origin of the Pentateuch. They suggested that various ancient documents authored by writers from various eras were combined by an anonymous editor around the time of Ezra to create the five books known as the Law of Moses or the Pentateuch.

Hermann Gunkel and Sigmund Mowinckel followed in their wake with the more elaborate theories of form criticism. According to these theories, Israelite folk tales circulated orally for generations, were gradually written down, and finally were compiled by various editors until the Pentateuch reached its present form.

Those who approached the origin of the Bible with these kinds of assumptions also dismissed the miraculous elements in the sacred books and searched in archaeological records to find natural explanations for what must have really happened. Similar theories abound to provide natural explanations for the origins of the other Old Testament books. The result of two centuries of higher criticism is that the Old Testament came to be viewed more as a record of the beliefs and values of the people of Israel at various times rather than as an accurate historical record or the actual revelation of God to Israel.

Theoretical Origins of the New Testament

Similar rationalistic approaches were taken to gospel material and the books of the New Testament. Several theories arose to provide a natural explanation of how the gospels came into being. Scholars soon concluded that Mark was the first gospel written because it was short and to the point and because much of the material in Mark also appears in Matthew and Luke. It was assumed that Matthew and Luke copied from Mark. Mark was dated at about A.D. 70 because it speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem and because of the assumption that knowledge of a particular event means that the document was written after the event in question. To suggest that an event could actually be foretold would be supernatural and therefore not fit the principles of higher criticism.

This pushed the dating of Matthew and Luke back into the 80s of the first century.

B.H. Streeter noted that because Matthew and Luke contained material unique to their respective gospels, he theorized that Matthew and Luke used their own special source along with Mark and a theoretical collection of Jesus' sayings they called "Q."

Rudolf Bultmann, Martin Dibelius, Hans Conzelmann and others followed shortly with their own ideas about how Christians in the first several decades after Jesus' death developed a folklore about Jesus, making him into a larger-than-life hero. They made a sharp distinction between the Jesus who really lived, whom they called the historical Jesus, and the Jesus created in Christian legend, whom they called the Christ of faith. They believed that after several decades of these developing folk tales, various editors within the ancient church compiled the legends into the individual written gospels. They further compiled them in such a manner as to advance certain teachings they considered helpful to the church of their day. As in the case of the Old Testament critics, these scholars came to view the New Testament as a witness to the faith and teachings of ancient Christians rather than the revelation of God through Christ and His apostles or as factual history.

Bultmann and his followers stripped away the supernatural and the miraculous from the accounts about Jesus and came to view the historical Jesus as just another Jewish teacher. They concluded that although the Jesus of the gospels never really existed, the gospel story created by His followers is powerful, convicting, life changing and beneficial for everyone who will reflect on it.

The Bible as Myth

Naturalistic approaches to both the Old and New Testament material resulted in the view that the Bible is largely mythological. Rather than the real account of God's interventions into human history, the Bible came to be seen as a collection of uplifting moral and spiritual stories that can be used to challenge and inspire modern people in their own experience but have no more authority than other great religious literature. Adherents to these views who still clung to some form of religion came to believe that the historical truth of Scripture does not matter as much as the power of the biblical message to transform lives. All of this resulted, for many, in an existentialist approach to the interpretation of Scripture. Basically, this means that each individual discovers his or her own private truth through interacting with the Bible story in the experience of

life. Any search for public, universal truth is seen as futile.

The Truth of the Bible

The reader may wonder what all of this has to do with churches of Christ. Simply this: The premise on which the Restoration Movement has been advanced is the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Because all Scripture is inspired by God and men spoke from God as they were "moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21 NKJV), we believe the Bible is true, and its message is authoritative as the governor of our thinking and behaviors (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We believe the events recorded in the Bible are true when presented as such. We believe in the historical veracity of the virgin birth, the miracles and the resurrection, just as we believe in the parting of the waters of the Red Sea and the fact that the walls of Jericho fell down flat. We believe that the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, was sent by Christ to the apostles to teach them everything and remind them of all that Jesus said (John 14:26). We have always accepted the Bible's supernatural explanation of how it came to be. We do not share the rationalistic assumptions of higher criticism. More and more of our professors who train our ministers, however, do accept the results of higher criticism, at least in part.

A prime example of this is *God's Holy Fire*, the second volume of the Heart of the Restoration Series published by ACU Press. The book is quite clear that its purpose is to redefine the nature and function of Scripture.

The authors state that the historicity of biblical events does not matter as much as the power of the biblical story. They assert that the gospels were not written by eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus. They assume a long natural evolution of the material in the Pentateuch until it was compiled into its final form. They seem to assume the truth of form criticism and redaction criticism. They leave the reader confused about the problems inherent in the transmission of the text, the translation of the text, and the process of canonization.

The authors end up suggesting that each individual and each congregation must interact with Scripture in their own experience and "listen patiently" for God to speak to them. Their redefinition of the nature and function of Scripture does not lead in the direction of calling Bible things by Bible names and doing Bible things in Bible ways. I fear it leads in the direction where doctrine and practice matter little and where there is little or no definite truth on which we may unite.

If one begins with the assumptions of higher criticism, one will

end up with nothing but a whiff of existential truth. If, however, we refuse to accept the naturalistic assumptions from the beginning, we can very easily come out at a different place. How do you know Mark was the first gospel written? How do you know Matthew and Luke copied from Mark? Could the Holy Spirit have inspired them all to write what they wrote? How do you know Mark was written about A.D. 70? Don't you believe Jesus could have predicted the destruction of Jerusalem before it happened? An endless series of similar questions might be asked.

We don't have to accept the assumptions of higher criticism. However, it is time we understand what those assumptions are because the battle for the church is going to be fought on the battleground of the nature and function of Scripture.

WHY ALL THE NEGLECT?

Tommy South

CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS A gift from God, and it will make churches healthier. However, that is not how most people think of it.

To see the importance discipline should play in the life of the church, first of all we have to be impressed by the sheer quantity of New Testament teaching on the subject. Only those texts that discuss corrective discipline, which includes everything from rebuking to withdrawing fellowship, will be included in the following survey.

The starting place, of course, is Jesus' words in Matthew 18:15-17, where He teaches us to go personally and privately to a brother who has sinned and to involve others only if necessary to bring the sinner to repentance. Failing that, "let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (RSV), i.e., stay away from him.

The letters of Paul contain numerous instructions about discipline. For example, Galatians 6:1 urges those "who are spiritual" (who are still walking by the Spirit) to restore anyone overtaken in a trespass.

A very explicit example of failing to walk by the Spirit is the Corinthian man who was living with his father's wife - his stepmother. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-8, Paul instructs the church to "deliver this man to Satan"—what we would call "dis-fellowshipping" him. Then, in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, Paul urges the church to extend forgiveness and comfort to someone who had sinned but had apparently repented. Scholars debate whether this is the same man as in

1 Corinthians 5; most think not, but I'm inclined to disagree.

An interesting text on discipline is 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, where Paul instructs the church to warn "the disorderly" ("the idle" in some translations) and not allow them to eat if they refuse to work. In a letter to a church he had never visited (Romans 16:17-18), Paul appeals to them to avoid people who create problems over the doctrine they had been taught.

In a similar vein, Titus 3:10-11 teaches that "factious" ("divisive") people ought to be completely avoided if they do not respond to only two warnings. Both letters to Timothy contain instructions to the young evangelist to "charge" people not to teach any different doctrine and to "correct" opponents with gentleness (1 Timothy 1:3-4; 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

In 1 Timothy 1:18-20, Paul even mentions a case in which he had personally "delivered to Satan" (same terminology as in 1 Corinthians 5:5) two men who needed to be taught a lesson about blasphemy.

But Jesus and Paul are not the only ones who gave teaching on this subject. In the brief third letter of John, "the elder" says that when he comes, he will confront the over-inflated Diotrephes about his behavior and his attitude (3 John 5-11).

Even more texts could be included, but these are sufficient to show that discipline is very much a part of the fabric of New Testament Christianity and that if we are serious about being biblical, it is a topic we cannot neglect.

Why do we neglect it? Few would deny that churches today are generally negligent of this teaching and practice.² But why? Why ignore these scriptures and their implications? Why refuse to practice something that obviously has such a prominent place in God's plan for the church?

Allow me to offer some suggestions as to this neglect:

Inadequate Models

Whenever I teach on this subject, I like to ask the group to raise their hands if they have ever personally witnessed a case of withdrawal of fellowship. Never have there been more than a few hands, regardless of the size or makeup of the audience. The problem is that the vast majority of members of churches of Christ have either no experience at all of corrective discipline, or they have had negative experiences in which things turned out disastrously.

One Sunday afternoon, after a letter of withdrawal had been read at the close of our morning assembly, a brother who had been

a Christian for 10 years (all of it in a previous congregation in another state) called and asked, "What was that that we did this morning?" After 10 years in the church, he had never even heard of discipline!

On the other hand, some have witnessed cases of corrective discipline that were so poorly handled and brought such negative results that they naturally never want to go through that again.

Bottom line: If you have not seen discipline done in a loving, helpful manner—and most have not—you are unlikely to be willing to be involved in it.

Lack of Genuine Fellowship

In Matthew 18:15, Jesus said, "If your brother sins. ..." Discipline is an outgrowth of fellowship, and one of its purposes is to preserve fellowship ("you have gained your brother"). Without true fellowship, discipline will be ineffective at best and abusive at worst.

We can only discipline effectively when people know and care about each other. Underlying all the New Testament texts on discipline is the assumption of this type of close-knit fellowship. For example, the Thessalonians were mutually reliant on each other to the point that the larger group could prevent someone from eating if the need arose. Note that this text is not about benevolence; it is about congregational discipline.

But such fellowship often does not exist in churches, and when it does not, discipline cannot exist either. That is why cases of corrective discipline are extremely rare in churches of more than 300 members—the people usually do not know each other well enough for it to make any sense.

This is an important point: You cannot just start a program of discipline. First you must focus on intensive fellowship. Discipline will naturally grow out of it.

Misunderstanding the Pastoral Role of Elders

Traditionally, in churches of Christ we have emphasized that preachers are not pastors. But too often our pastors are not pastors either. In my experience the majority of elders and congregations do not even think of discipline as part of their pastoral function. Yet what is more inherent in the role of pastors (shepherds) than the reclaiming of lost sheep? (See Hebrews 13:17.)

Let me hasten to add that we should not think of elders as being solely responsible for discipline. They are not. Jesus said, speaking to all disciples, "If your brother sins. ..." When Paul wrote his disciplinary instructions to churches, he addressed them to the entire church, without singling out any individuals or groups as being solely

responsible for carrying them out.

But it is highly unlikely that churches are going to discipline one another unless they are led to do so by their elders. Practically speaking, someone has to take the lead, particularly when discipline becomes congregation-wide. And who is more suited to do so than the shepherds of the church?

Failure to Love as God Loves

Hebrews 12:4-10 teaches that the Lord disciplines those He loves, and Jesus told the church at Laodicea, "Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten" (Revelation 3:19). In other words, the need for discipline in the church is an outgrowth of God's disciplining love for us and of our need to reflect His love by loving one another..

Ironically, the most frequent objection to the practice of corrective discipline is, "It's unloving!" But there can be no true love without discipline, and it is no more unloving for us to discipline one another than it is for God to discipline us! What is unloving is to watch people sink into sin and do nothing about it.

The opposite of love, biblically speaking, is not hatred; it is indifference. In the same context in which Jesus teaches us to go to our brother when he sins, He sternly warns, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Matthew 18:10). And the Greek word for "despise" means "to count as worthless." What are we saying when we ignore the fact that someone's life has become dominated by sin? "I love you"? Or "I don't care that much; it's just too difficult"? It is always easier to do nothing, but it is not loving.

Lack of Motivation

Although all of the above contribute to our neglect of discipline, there is, in my opinion, one dominant reason for it: We do not believe that it will do any good. As a result, we remain unmotivated. Despite all that Scripture says, we have to confess that we are just not convinced. After one instance of public discipline, an angry, lifelong member of the church declared to me, "That ought never to be done!"

Where discipline is concerned, we have replaced faith with fear. Fear of failure. Fear of making a mistake and making a bad situation worse. Fear of turning off outsiders and losing members. Even the fear of lawsuits!

All of this amounts to nothing less than a failure of confidence in the Word, so that we prefer our own methods to God's. Discipline clearly does not fit with the thinking of our society, which cherishes the ideals of minding our own business, living and letting live, not

judging, and having the freedom (even the “right”) to choose our own way. Paul wrote that two of the functions of Scripture are to rebuke and correct us. Perhaps in no other area of church life do we need rebuking and correcting more than in our attitude toward discipline.

Jesus Christ: Friend of Sinners

Clem Thurman

JESUS IS PICTURED IN the Scriptures as a true friend of sinners. He walked and talked with them so much that He was openly criticized by the scribes and Pharisees. Luke explains, *“Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him. And both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them”* (Luke 15:1-2). While others were overly concerned with their reputation, Jesus was more interested in what He could do to help people that needed Him. Thus the charge didn’t bother Him that much when they said, *“Behold, a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners”* (Luke 7:34).

The Scriptures declare, *“Friendship of the world is enmity with God”* (James 4:4). But Jesus could walk that fine line of being friends with worldly people without being friends with the worldliness in which they engaged. We need to learn to walk that same line.

Great Parables About the Lost

In answer to criticism that He was a friend of sinners, Jesus told three great parables in Luke 15. The first (Luke 15:4-7) was the story of a man with a hundred sheep, and one is lost in the wilderness. The shepherd was so concerned that he left the ninety-nine to go search for, and find, the one lost sheep. On finding it, he placed it upon his shoulder and brought it back to the fold. Then, rejoicing, he called together his friends and neighbors, saying, *“Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.”* Then Jesus added, *“I say unto you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine, who need no repentance.”*

The next parable which the Lord told was that of the lost coin: *“Or what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found*

the piece which I had lost. Even so, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:8-10).

Possibly the most loved parable Jesus ever told is that of "the lost boy," usually called "the prodigal son" (Luke 15:11-24). A young man leaves the comfort of his father's home and journeys to "a far country." There he wastes his funds, his friends forsake him, and he is reduced to feeding hogs in order to live. As he was eating hog-feed in the pig-sty, *"He came to himself and decided to return home and ask his father to make him a hired servant."*

The father's concern for his wayward son, his welcome when the young man returned home and his joyful words of welcome, all show the deep and tender feelings that Jesus had for sinners. Where can one find more beautiful words than these? *"Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found"* (v. 23-25). That his older brother resented the young man's return and protested the merriment did not deter the father. The party went on as planned!

It is in this parable that Jesus gave His most severe rebuke to the scribes and Pharisees for their criticism of His association with sinners. As Jesus explained to them on another occasion, *"They that are in health have no need of a physician; but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"* (Luke 5:31-32). It is a very dark day in any religious man's life when he is not burdened for sinners. Our Lord gave us wonderful examples of how friendship with them can help us to *"seek and save the lost"* (Luke 19:10).

Jesus is the Savior of Sinners

Not only is Jesus pictured as the friend of sinners, he is also shown to be the Savior of sinners. The angel announced to Joseph, *"Thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins"* (Matt. 1:21). John announced, at the beginning of the Lord's ministry, *"Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). Jesus, Himself, defined His purpose on earth very clearly: *"The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10).

We should be exceedingly grateful that Jesus is the Savior of sinners, for *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23). As the apostle writes later, *"God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"*

(Rom. 5:8). Not while we were righteous, not while we were trying to serve God, but while we were in rebellion to His will, God sent Jesus to save us from sin. Man cannot save himself, he must have a Savior. As the prophet described Jesus as our sacrifice for sin, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"* (Isa. 53:6).

The cross of Calvary is the climax of the world's history, for we see in it God's love and His desire to save us from sin. The cross is the reason Jesus came into the world. *"Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is the devil"* (Heb. 2:14). He died to overcome Satan and set us free. And He was raised to become our Mediator: *"He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them"* (Heb. 7:25). He shed His blood to cleanse us from sin and to keep us free from sin (1 John 1:7).

Jesus Was Moved by the Value of a Soul

The first chapter of the Bible describes our beginning: *"God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul"* (Gen. 1:26; 2:7). Of all of God's creation, man is unique. Only man is made in God's image. To show the importance of the "soul" of man, Jesus said: *"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matt. 16:26). Recognizing this priceless possession that God has given man, He desired that man might save it forever. The price He paid for man's redemption indicates the value God placed on man's soul. *"Ye were bought with a price"* (1 Cor. 6:20).

The concern of Jesus for lost mankind is graphically pictured in Matt. 9:36, *"He came forth and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things"* (Mark 6:34). They were blind to God's love and their own spiritual need, so Jesus had compassion on them. The word "compassion" literally means to "feel with." Jesus felt their lostness, their lack of purpose. They needed a shepherd, and He became the Good Shepherd to them. Jesus later said, *"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep"* (John 10:11).

Jesus Saw the Potential in People

When Andrew brought his brother to Jesus, the Lord saw in the simple fisherman the character that was to be developed into the great apostle Peter. He saw what Peter could become. Although Peter made some mistakes, He did become what Jesus envisioned for him. He called James and John, sons of Zebedee, "*Sons of Thunder*" (Mark 3:17), men of fiery disposition who wanted to call down fire from heaven on some who rejected Jesus (Luke 9:54). However, they proved worthy of the trust of apostleship to which He appointed them.

One of the most interesting stories of the Scriptures is told in John 4. He opened a conversation with a Samaritan woman, who evidently was rather sinful, and revealed to her that He was "*the Christ*" (v. 26). Most "respectable" men would not even have spoken to the woman. But Jesus saw possibilities others could not, or—would not. She went back and told the city, and all the people came out to see Jesus, and "*many of the Samaritans believed on him because of the word of the woman*" (v. 39). They then said to the woman, "*Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world*" (v. 42).

Jesus also looked down on a sinful world and determined that man could be better, that we could leave sin and live for God. That is why He was willing to leave heaven and come to earth to die on that cruel cross. He saw the potential in us, when we could not even see it in ourselves. Take a fanatical enemy who "*laid waste the church*" (Acts 8:3), even helping to put Christians to death (Acts 26:10), and turn him into one who would say: "*For me to live is Christ. . . I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me. . . What things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ*" (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:7). Because Jesus could see that kind of potential in you and me, He died for us, also!

In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). Again, John wrote, "*Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us*" (1 John 3:16). In talking with His disciples about His purpose in going to Jerusalem, where He had already revealed that He would be killed, He told them: "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:13). Few passages describe better what He did for us, and why, as this

one: *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich"* (2 Cor. 8:9). Jesus was moved to action on our behalf. When we recognize the value of souls, and see the potential in people who were created in God's image, we should be spurred to action as He was.

THE BIBLE

Tommy Hagewood

FOLLOWING ARE FOUR IMPORTANT facts about the Bible we should all know.

1. The Bible is the **ONLY BOOK** that came to us from the mind of God. All other books were produced merely by human beings. The Bible, on the other hand, comes from God's mind and was revealed through human agents (apostles and prophets) by the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-13; Galatians 1:11,12; Ephesians 3:1-5).
2. The Bible is the **ONLY BOOK** that comes to us from the heart of God. In speaking of God's people in Romans 9:23-26, Paul notes that God has called out His people to make known *"the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory"*. This fact is not only revealed to us in this passage but, according to Paul, was also prophesied in Hosea 1:10. This great love is encapsulated in John 3:16.
3. The Bible is the **ONLY BOOK** that tells us **ALL** things we must know, believe, and do to get to heaven (2 Peter 1:3). It will make one a child of God and will make that child complete; nothing else is acceptable for our spiritual needs.
4. The Bible is the **ONLY BOOK** by which human beings will be judged. The part of the Bible by which you will be judged is the New Testament (John 12:48; Romans 2:16). The basis of that judgment will be the deeds we do in the body while living on earth (2 Corinthians 5:10).

No other book should command our interested attention like the Bible. Why not read it every day?

THE LIVING WORD FOR DYING MEN

Bill Dillon

NO THOUGHT IS MORE significant than that men are dying creatures. David said in 1 Chronicles 29:15, *"our days on the earth are as a shadow; and there is none abiding."* Job said that man *"cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not"* (Job 14:2). The best statement a man can make, at any time, regarding his stay on the earth is to say, *"there is but a step between me and death"* (1 Samuel 20:3). Can you say for sure that you will be alive next year? Next month? Next day/ hour/ minute? If you don't know the future, isn't it about time you became better acquainted with the God of the future? The Living God has given His Living Word to a dying humanity. Philippians 2:16 calls it the *"word of life"*. Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is *"quick [living] and active and sharper than any two-edged sword"*.

This old world is one of ultimate winding down. The metal rusts; the wood rots; the flesh decays; but there is an incorruptible substance called the *"Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever"* (1 Peter 1:23). Wouldn't it serve your best interest to exercise a greater awareness about the contents of that Word? First Peter 2:2 admonishes, *"desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may be able to grow thereby"*. The Christians of Berea were said to be *"more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scripture daily"* (Acts 17:11).

The Bible is the means by which you can achieve speaking terms with God, as James 1:18 teaches: *"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth..."*. The Bible commands all men to repent (Acts 17:30,31) and every creature to be baptized (Mark 16:15,16). The shame of our day is that so many are found to be ignorant of the imperishable Book of the Ages. To be ignorant of God's Word is no sin—but *staying* that way is! If you're going to change for the better, then do it now—your time may be about up!

God Means What He Says

Rick Cunningham

God killed two priests. They were Moses' nephews, Aaron's sons. They were burning incense in their censers as priests were to do. They were supposed to light the incense with fire from the altar. Instead, they used unauthorized fire from elsewhere.

Immediately, fire came from God and consumed them. Moses said to Aaron, *"This is what the Lord spoke of when he said: 'Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored'"* (Leviticus 10:3).

Nadab and Abihu, these two priests, are remembered for their unauthorized acts and their resulting death. A point was made for all time — Do not take liberties with God's Word!

Today, we live in a time when Nadab and Abihu would feel comfortable. Liberty is in vogue. "Do as you please" is popular. But the fact is, God's Word is as certain as ever. We would do well to hold to everything God says, to honor Him by obeying His Word.

Before we do anything unauthorized by God, we should recall Nadab and Abihu. **God means what He says.**

And God Created the World, How Long Ago?

Dave Everson

THERE HAS BEEN A great deal of focus in the popular press about the discoveries of the Hubble Telescope. These discoveries are being interpreted in light of "old age for the universe" bias. Remember, most scientists today believe that life evolved from inanimate matter, and this process would take vast eons of time. So, each new discovery is interpreted in a way to support a long period of time. This does not rule out other possibilities as being the right answer; it simply gives one explanation. Well, this question of how old the earth is, is an important one, for if it is not billions of years old, then evolution could not have had time to occur. Let's look at what we can know about how old the earth is.

First, the Bible does not tell when the earth was created! But when the Bible gives information that relates to the passing of time,

it is not wrong! It does this in the genealogies given in Genesis 5:1-2, Chronicles and the New Testament. By taking the ages given here, it is possible to get a time frame on how long ago the creation was. This number comes out in the 6,000 to 10,000 year range. This is a far cry from the 4.5 billion estimated by evolutionists. Is each of the genealogies exact in the names and dates given, no, but the problems that we know about are because of other lists that point them out. There may be some unfilled gaps in the chronology given in the Bible, but they do not give billions of years of time! What should the Christian believe?

- One, realize that knowing the exact time of creation has nothing to do with our salvation. Have faith that it happened in the way God said it did, that Jesus and the inspired writers believed it, and that obedience to God's commands is the most important thing we can do.
- Two, we can have questions and look at the evidences from the physical world around us, but we need to remember that when an explanation is given that disagrees with what God's Word says, we can know it is wrong, no matter how many scientists believe it. The Bible's answer is the right one, and that should end it.
- Three, realize that there are many evidences that indeed show the earth is not billions of years old. These evidences are not well known because the evolutionary scientists do not want them to weaken their case; so, they do not mention them.
- Four, even the historians have now dated with accuracy the events of the Bible back to the time of Abraham. This does not leave many generations back to Adam for the millions and millions of years to occur if we try to hold on to evolutionary dogma *and* the Bible. There have been many in the religious world, and indeed some in the churches of Christ, who have tried to accept the interpretations of the evolutionists and make them fit what the Bible says. This is sad and very dangerous, because it questions what God has said. We should take the Bible as fact *first* and then examine the evidences to see if and how they might fit into what happened. Let us strengthen our faith to believe "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1).

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