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Editor, Keith Sharp

Designer, William Stewart



- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

In This Issue...

- **Why Should You Read, Study, Know the Bible? (Part 3)** | *Jefferson David Tant*
- **May The Put Away Fornicator Marry Another?** | *Patrick Donahue*
- **When God Says No!** | *Jim Mickells*
- **Following The Pattern In Benevolence** | *Greg Gwin*
- **Biblical Hermeneutics (1)** | *William Stewart*
- **Judging Righteously** | *Michael D. Hickox*
- **Who Are Your Friends?** | *Ethan Jennings*
- **But Whom Say Ye That I Am?** | *Keith Sharp*
- **Introduction to Numbers** | *Keith Sharp*

Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE AND IF THERE
IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

"The way of a guilty man is perverse;
But as for the pure, his work is right." (Proverbs 21:8)

The way you live is a demonstration of your character.

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at christistheway.com.

Why Should You Read, Study, Know The Bible? (Part 3)

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

A Medical Prescription

If you were sick with a deadly disease, it is obvious that you would go to the doctor. After examining you and making a diagnosis, he would prescribe a treatment, which might include medicine, a special diet, exercise, etc. Now, if your life depended on it, would you be willing to follow his instructions? You know you would. If you took your prescription to the pharmacist, and he began to substitute different medicines or proportions from what the doctor said, would you argue with him? Would you try to become informed? Obviously.

What about your spiritual life, which has to do with your life now and in eternity? Do you realize that you are afflicted with a deadly disease? It is called sin, and it is guaranteed to bring death.

Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

You may be thinking, "But I am not a sinner. I don't rob banks. I'm not a drunk. I'm not like so many people I know. I really try to live a good life." And you should be thankful for that. But have you ever done

anything wrong in your life? Told a lie? Had a bad attitude? Stolen something? Taken God's name in vain? Gossiped? Any sin separates us from a holy God.

Isaiah 59:1-2: *"Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."*

Since *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23), we need a remedy that will restore us to spiritual health, to make us one with God again. Are you surprised to note that Jesus Christ is cast in the role of a physician?

Mark 2:17: *"And hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"*

Is it not strange that so many are not very concerned about their spiritual health? They don't read the Bible, the book that provides the cure. They just take what this one or that one says, and don't check it out for themselves. Now, if your physical life was on the line, and different doctors were giving conflicting advice, but there was one medical journal in which you had supreme confidence, do you think you would do some research on your own to try to determine which doctor was telling you the truth? Obviously. Isn't your eternal health even more important? And when denominational preachers give different ways to cure the disease of sin, or give instructions that contradict what the authoritative medical journal (the Bible) says, don't you think it pays to learn what the book says? The question hardly needs an answer.

Why would we be so concerned about following the prescription that the doctor gave exactly, but not show the same concern in following the prescription given by the great Physician? Indeed, that seems strange.

What Is the Prescription?

Concerning our salvation, which includes the forgiveness of our sins and citizenship in God's kingdom/church, the plan is very simple.

(1) One must believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God.

John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."* But there are many who believe (only) who will not be saved.

John 12:42-43: *"Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God."*

The Scriptures further state that "faith only" will not save.

James 2:24: *"You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone."*

Now, many denominational preachers will tell you that we are saved by faith alone, but I prefer to follow the doctor's orders, for He goes on to tell that...

(2) we must repent (turn) from our sins.

Luke 13:3: *"I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*

If we are not going to live by the directions he gives us, then his "medicine" will do us no good. We are also told that we must...

(3) confess our faith.

Matthew 10:32: *"Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before me, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven."* This was a stumbling block to those rulers mentioned earlier. They "believed" on Jesus but refused to "confess" Him. They wouldn't take the whole prescription. Guess what happens? Many denominational preachers will go this far with God's plan, but then balk at...

(4) baptism for the forgiveness of sins. But the instructions are quite clear in several passages of Scripture.

Mark 16:16: *"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."*

John 3:3-5: *"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.'"*

And the Bible goes on.

Acts 2:38: *"And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"*

Acts 22:16: *'And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'*

Romans 6:3-5: *"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."*

Galatians 3:27: *"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*

1 Peter 3:21: *"And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."*

There are other passages, but I believe the point has been established. How men can explain it away is beyond me. But Satan has always been good at explaining away what God has said. Mother Eve learned that the hard way in the Garden of Eden, as told in Genesis 3.

When one has by faith become obedient to what God has said, that person is added to the body or church of Christ (Acts 2:47), not a denomination, but the church that is described for us in the pages of God's Word. If you will do this, you will become a Christian, and only a Christian, not a Methodist-Christian, Jehovah's Witness-Christian, Catholic-Christian, or any other "hyphenated Christian." Just a Christian. That's all the early disciples were, and that's all God wants us to be even today.

Conclusion

There are other illustrations that describe the Bible's usefulness and importance to us, but these should suffice to get the point across. There is no other more important book in the world! Where else can you go to learn the most important information in all the world? In the Gospel of John Christ is having a discussion with his disciples, and has some pointed words for them.

John 6:63: *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."*

After some of his followers left him because they didn't want to hear some tough things he was saying, he turned to his chosen twelve.

John 6:67-69: *"Jesus said therefore to the twelve, 'You do not want to go away also, do you?' Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.'"*

And yes, the Bible is important even for young people. The apostle Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy with this admonition:

2 Timothy 3:14-17: *“You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*

The decision is yours. The question, as was asked by Pilate at the trial of Jesus is: “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” (Matthew 27:22) What you do with Him will largely depend on what you know of His Word, for therein is God revealed to us, as well as His plan for mankind. It is in your hands--literally and figuratively.

May The Put Away Fornicator Marry Another?

Patrick Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Matthew 19:9b reads “whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” That snippet doesn’t specify either way if the woman under consideration has been put away for fornication or for a reason other than fornication, so it would include both. If she is “put away” period, she can’t remarry (according to God) – unless her former husband dies (Romans 7:2-3).

When we realize Matthew 19:9 and the like tells us the facts of the case (it is adultery to divorce and remarry), and Romans 7:2-3 tells us the reason for those facts, then most of these questions about the details can be easily answered. Romans 7:2-3 says a wife is bound (obligated) to her husband as long as he lives. The only given exception to that is if she puts him away for his fornication (Matthew 19:9a). But if he puts her away for fornication, that is not excepted; she is still bound to him. Therefore, it would be a sin for her to remarry someone else, because she is still bound to her original husband.

On the other hand, if a put away fornicator is not bound to her former spouse, and instead she is loosed, then I Corinthians 7:27-28 would say she is free to remarry. But that would contradict Matthew 19:9b, therefore a put away fornicator must still be bound to her former spouse, and therefore not free to remarry.

Why is it “adultery” (“unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another” – Vine’s Bible Dictionary) for a woman put away for fornication to remarry? If it is called “adultery,” that must mean she is still tied (bound/obligated) to her original spouse in some way. And if she is still bound to him, how could she be free to remarry another? She couldn’t.

Some use the illustration of a rope to prove that a woman put away for fornication is not still bound to her former husband. They point out that if two people are bound by a rope and the rope is cut freeing one, the other is necessarily freed. They then reason similarly that when a man puts away his wife for fornication, he is unbound, therefore the rope must be cut and the guilty wife is freed also. We need to remember that illustrations never prove anything; they just illustrate, and therefore this non-Biblical illustration proves nothing. The situation where one party is unbound while the other is still bound can be illustrated (non-Biblically) as well. It used to be when a college football player decided to transfer to another school, he would have to sit out a year to be eligible at the second school. During that year he may not play for the second school, but the first school is under no obligation to pay his scholarship and actually may sign another player in his place. So it could be said that for that one year the player is bound to the first school (he may play at the first school but not at a second), but the first school is unbound from the player (they may sign another player to replace him). That is the way many contracts work, and marriage is a contract, not a rope.

On the other hand, some teach Matthew 19:9b disallows a man from choosing to remarry a wife he has

divorced for fornication because she is a divorced woman. Let's discuss that next ...

First notice that if this argument were sound it would also disallow a man from remarrying a wife he has divorced for a cause other than fornication - for the same reason, because she is a divorced woman. But as we all know, First Corinthians 7:10-11 clearly falsifies that, so we know the argument under consideration is unsound.

Second, we see from Matthew 19:9 itself the man is forbidden from divorcing his scriptural wife and marrying "another," which would imply it would be okay for him to remarry the same woman, the one he divorced. She is not "another" which is the thing forbidden by the text. That's pretty easy to understand, isn't it?

Third, we've proven above the put away fornicator is still bound to her original spouse. Therefore, it would not be a sin for her to remarry him (if he were willing), because she is still bound to him. If she is still bound to him, how could it be adultery for her to remarry him? It couldn't (Romans 7:2-3).

We must take all of what the New Testament says on the subject of Divorce And Remarriage (Matthew 4:4), just like salvation or any other subject. If we don't, we are likely to miss details of the truth (John 8:31-32).

When God Says No!

Jim Mickells | Sellersburg, Indiana, USA

When the answer given to our prayers is no by the Lord this is quite a challenge to our faith. Our prayers are offered to God expecting a positive response. Yet that does not always happen. The Bible tells us how to pray. We are told to pray (Matthew 6:9); pray according to God's will (1 John 5:14-15), to ask in faith and trust (James 1:5-8), with a spirit of humility (Luke 18:9-14), live as He instructs (Psalm 66:18; Proverbs 28:9), and offer our prayers by the authority of Christ (John 14:13-14; 5:16), etc. One great example I want us to notice is when Paul asked the thorn in the flesh to be removed the Lord's answer was no, the thorn would remain. There are so many valuable lessons for us in this section of the Scriptures.

"And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

The apostle didn't just ask one time and then stop. He asked three times, and most likely if he had not received an answer he would have continued to ask for the thorn's removal. Jesus taught the parable of the persistent widow so "that men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1-8). The NKJV says that he "pleaded with the Lord." The word "pleaded" is defined as "to beg, entreat, beseech" (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. 482). Several translations have the word "begged." In this you can see the great earnestness of Paul as he prayed for the Lord to remove it.

Even though the thorn was not removed the apostle accepted the answer received and trusted in Christ. Remember why the thorn was given in the beginning, "lest I be exalted above measure" (verse 7)? Do you think it accomplished its desired purpose? I believe so. Satan meant it for evil, yet the Lord used it for good. It would have been extremely easy for this man to be lifted up with pride being placed in the position he held. Think of all the miracles he was able to perform by the Holy Spirit, the word of God revealed through him, the authority he had as an apostle, etc. When told "My grace is sufficient for you," he made no argument and was willing to abide by what he was told. The word "grace" (as used in this text) is defined

as, “the favor of Christ, assisting and strengthening his followers and ministers to bear their troubles” (Thayer. 666). Jesus willingly helped him through these difficult times.

Christ’s strength was manifested in aiding the weakness which Paul experienced in the flesh. It was through the strength of Jesus which helped the apostle overcome all the difficulties he faced in life. Notice this brief comment, “The Lord answered his prayer, not by removing the thorn, but by giving grace to bear it, and by the assurance that Paul’s sense of weakness, caused by it, fitted him to receive the divine strength” (Johnson’s Notes on the New Testament). His life was a testimony to the power possessed by the Lord, and no doubt it brought Him honor and glory. This is the reason he could rejoice in all the difficulties he was dealing with. Notice the apostle’s words in writing to those at Phillippi, he said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

It was through the strength given by the Lord which enabled him to continue to do the work assigned and to remain faithful in serving his Lord. Look at all the things this great man of God endured (2 Corinthians 11:22-33), and yet, when dealing with his thorn of the flesh, asking that it be removed, and the answer was no, he did not lose heart and pressed forward. When his life on earth was coming to an end, he could rejoice that the crown of righteousness would be given to him by our righteous Judge was awaiting him (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Thayer gives us this definition of the “crown of righteousness” – “the eternal blessedness which will be given as a prize to the genuine servants of God and Christ: the crown (wreath) which is the reward of righteousness.”

What do we learn from Paul when God says no to our prayers? There may be valuable lessons for us. It could be to humble us, not to trust in self, and to see the need we have for our Great God. We must continue to trust and have faith in our Lord even when we might not understand why we must endure the hardships of life. Never lose sight of how much we are loved by Jehovah. Remember He gave His Son to die on the cross so we can become His adopted children and spend eternity in heaven with Him. Just like Paul is a great example for us, we can be one to others who may see the things we are enduring and yet are still faithful to our Lord. When I start to feel sorry for myself, I look around and see all the others who are dealing with a lot more than me and yet are very loyal to our Heavenly Father. And finally, never lose sight of heaven and our eternal reward. One day there will be no more thorns to trouble us (Revelation 21:4). “O Lord, come!” (1 Corinthians 16:22).

Following The Pattern In Benevolence

Greg Gwin | Columbia, Tennessee, USA

As one studies the work of first century congregations, it becomes obvious that benevolence was an important part of the work God authorized them to do. We know that specific commands were given directing churches to provide for those in need.

An important and inescapable conclusion based on a review of this subject is this: congregations always and exclusively used their collective funds for the relief of needy saints. A complete listing of all examples of church benevolence clearly demonstrates this truth:

- “all that believed” (Acts 2:44,45)
- “them that believed” (Acts 4:32-35)
- “the disciples” (Acts 6:1)
- “relief unto the brethren” (Acts 11:29)
- “unto the saints” (Romans 15:25)
- “for the poor saints” (Romans 15:26)
- “accepted of the saints” (Romans 15:31)
- “collection for the saints” (1 Corinthians 16:1)
- “ministering to the saints” (2 Corinthians 8:4)
- “the ministering to the saints” (2 Corinthians 9:1)

- “supplieth the need of the saints” (2 Corinthians 9:12)
- “relieve them that are widows indeed” (1 Timothy 5:16)

It must be emphasized that individual Christians can and should use their personal funds to “do good unto all men” (Galatians 6:10), but when acting as a collective body, the church can only provide benevolence to Christians in need.

This church assistance can be administered as follows:

- A church may care for its own needy saints (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-35; 6:1-8).
- One church may send to many churches in order to relieve needy saints (Acts 11:27-30).
- Many churches may send to one church to relieve needy saints (1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:1-2; Romans 15:25-32).

In the Scriptures we never read of man-made benevolent organizations that were established or supported by churches. And, of course, no so-called “sponsoring churches” existed as they would have been a violation of local church autonomy and the limited oversight of local elders (1 Peter 5:2).

Let us be careful to follow the Biblical pattern in all of our work for the Lord.

Biblical Hermeneutics (1)

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

D.R. Dungan began his textbook on Hermeneutics with the succinct definition: *“Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation.”* Merriam-Webster further stated that hermeneutics is *“the study of the methodological principles of interpretation (as of the Bible); a method or principle of interpretation.”* In short, hermeneutics is the study of how to study the Bible.

An Honest Pursuit of Truth

Whether we're familiar with or remember the term “hermeneutics” is unimportant. What is essential is for us to be equipped with the principles and practices of biblical interpretation. The apostle Paul wrote, *“...do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is”* (Ephesians 5:17, NKJV). God expects us to understand His word, and more than that, to obey it (Matthew 7:21; John 14:15; Acts 5:29; James 1:22-25; etc).

We must deal honestly with the Scriptures. Years ago, I studied with a denominational preacher who acknowledged baptism was for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). However, he taught salvation by faith alone. He knew the Bible taught the former but he was paid to preach the latter. Paul spoke about such men as *“...idle talkers and deceivers ... teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain”* (Titus 1:10-11, NKJV). In conversation with another preacher about the nature of truth (John 8:32; 17:17), I used 2+2 as an illustration. The answer is 4. It doesn't matter who you are, where you are, or when you are: 2+2=4. Truth is consistent; it does not change. And yet this fellow suggested to me that 2+2 can equal 5. He explained: if the equation is 2.4+2.4, we can round 2.4 down to 2, but 2.4+2.4 is 4.8, which we can round up to 5. Ergo, 2+2 can be 5. Friend, God does not want us rounding off His word! Studying the Bible requires more respect and precision than this man was willing to give.

Paul wrote to Timothy,

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15, NKJV)

The phrase “rightly dividing” comes from the Greek word *orthotomeo*. Strong defines it as *“...to make a*

straight cut ... to dissect (expound) correctly (the divine message)..." Mounce adds, "...to set forth truthfully, without perversion or distortion."

Understanding the Bible is not a matter of opinion or private interpretation. We must do better. It is the word of God, a divine message, and thus warrants the utmost respect. We must set aside our whims and preconceptions and deal honestly with the Bible. Make a straight cut.

Some Basics To Acknowledge About The Bible

The Bible is the will of God revealed to mankind. There is plenty of evidence which attests to the authenticity of the Bible. Our goal herein is not to examine such in detail. That said, I would recommend the reader have at least a cursory knowledge of the case to be made for the reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible.

1. It has a harmonious message, despite being penned by approximately 40 authors from various backgrounds and diverse circumstances over 1600 years.
2. It is wonderfully specific and accurate in prophetic matters (ie. Daniel 11).
3. It is meticulous in historical and geographic details (consider archaeologist William Ramsay).
4. It is not a science textbook but contains accurate foreknowledge of various scientific fields.
5. It addresses man's needs regarding morality and preparation for eternity.

The Bible has been accurately preserved through the ages. We can trust the Bible. Approximately 25,000 ancient copies or fragments of copies have been unearthed (in several languages, including Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Slavic, etc.). Concerning the outstanding mass of manuscript evidence available, liberal textual critic Bart Ehrman has said, *"...they all contain mistakes – altogether many thousands of mistakes."* This quote has been used to undermine the reliability of the Bible. However, in a subsequent writing, Ehrman stated, *"...of all the hundreds of thousands of textual changes found among our manuscripts, most of them are completely insignificant, immaterial of no real importance for anything other than showing that scribes could not spell or keep focused any better than the rest of us."* The existence of copyist errors is innocuous due to the sheer volume of manuscripts available and the unmalicious nature of the mistakes. The message of Scripture has not been changed or altered. Thus...

The Bible is infallible truth. Jesus referred to the word of God as "truth" (John 17:17). God's word is trustworthy. Man is fallible; man's doctrines are fallible; man's interpretation of God's word can be fallible, but God's word endures forever and is truth (1 Peter 1:23-25; Isaiah 40:8).

The Bible is complete and final. All Scripture has been revealed (Jude 3; 2 Peter 1:3). In the first century, God bestowed various gifts whereby His word was revealed among His people (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). The absence of these miraculous revelatory gifts in our present time bears witness to the fact we now have access to complete revelation, the entirety of Scripture (1 Corinthians 13:9-10).

The Bible is understandable. Paul, an apostle of Christ, wrote to a congregation of average people saying, *"...by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge of the mystery of Christ)..."* (Ephesians 3:3-4). We can understand the message of the Bible.

The Bible is authoritative. Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). We must rightly divide, understand, submit to, and obey His word (John 14:15; 1 Peter 4:17; Hebrews 5:9; Galatians 3:1; etc.).

A Few Things To Be Cautious About

Language does not suddenly change because it is found in the Bible. That would make it impossible to understand God's word. We need to approach the Bible with the same rules of language we use for any

other written work. That said, we must have the utmost respect for it – it is not a mystery novel given for our entertainment. It is the word of God, given to expose sin, turn hearts, and reveal salvation through Jesus Christ. We must hold the Scriptures in high esteem and employ reasonable logic and common sense as we seek to understand them.

Do not come to God's word with a bias. Be careful about any preconceived ideas we have. Our approach to the Bible must be to obtain instruction and teaching, not to sustain it. If we come with a doctrine already set in our mind, seeking to prove it from the Bible, we will find what we seek. But at what cost? Truth!! Paul cautioned that those who do not love the truth will find delusion, believe the lie, and be condemned (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). Those who love the truth will see the consistent message of Scripture by their diligent study. Those who do not love truth will become experts at proof-texting.

For example, if someone holds to the common doctrine of salvation by faith alone, they will overemphasize “faith texts” and ignore other texts. They will confidently declare that 105 New Testament texts state we are saved by faith, but they will ignore James 2:24; Mark 16:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 3:18; Hebrews 5:9; 1 Peter 4:17 and many other texts.

Do not appeal to human authority. There is nothing wrong with citing commentators, well-known preachers or theologians, lexicons, Bible dictionaries, etc.. These are all useful tools when used correctly. However, they are all human in origin and thus subject to error. Don't say, “my preacher says _____” It doesn't matter what any preacher said – it matters what God's word says. One of the biggest name evangelists in recent history was Billy Graham. He was not the originator of the sinner's prayer, but he brought it to prominence in the protestant world. There is NO sinner's prayer in the Bible. Graham taught that people can be saved without knowing Jesus, contrary to John 14:6, Acts 4:12 and Romans 10:17. Use resources, but don't use them to defend a preconceived or biased opinion which contradicts the plain teaching of Scripture.

Do not appeal to popularity as a means of determining truth. Citing what the majority think or teach on a topic has no weight whatsoever on the truthfulness of a matter. Where was the majority in Noah's day? Ten of the 12 spies sent to the land of Canaan were wrong. All but 2 of the Exodus generation perished in the wilderness. The majority bowed before an image set up by Nebuchadnezzar. The majority of first century religious leaders rejected Jesus. When our Lord said, “*many are called, but few are chosen*” (Matthew 20:16; 22:14), or “*narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*” (Matthew 7:14), He bluntly revealed that the majority do not find eternal life.

Different Types of Bible Literature

We will close this introductory session by considering briefly the kinds of literature found in the Bible. It is important to know and acknowledge the differences. Every page of the Bible is God's word, but not every writing style is to be approached or understood the same. Poetic language should not be treated the same way as a legal code.

There are Law books in the Bible. The first 5 books of the Bible are called the Torah or Pentateuch. Parts of them are written as a legal code (Exodus 20-40, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy), while other parts are historical narrative (Genesis, Exodus 1-19, Numbers). The legal code is statutory, establishing commands to be followed, penalties for violation, etc..

As mentioned, part of what we call the Law is narrative literature. A large portion of the Bible is narrative. Genesis tells the story of creation, Noah, Abraham and his family. Numbers is also primarily narrative, telling the story of the wilderness wanderings. The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah are all historical narrative. There are also biographical narratives such as Ruth, Esther, and Job (though Job is as much poetry as it is narrative). The gospels are narrative, as is the book

of Acts. Narrative writing helps teach us about the world, about serving God, and about ourselves. A common narrative tool in Jesus' teaching was parables.

A considerable part of the Bible (close to 1/3) is poetry. As noted above, large parts of Job are poetic. The Psalms, the Proverbs, the book of Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon are all poetic books. Additionally, sections in various narrative books contain poetry. For instance, Samson's riddle in Judges 14. There are different poetic formats or tools – simile, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, personification, etc.. Poetry appears a lot in praise (songs, psalms of worship), but is also used as a teaching tool to emphasize God's greatness and to warn of the danger of sin. Poetry extends beyond the literal use and meaning of words.

There are large sections of the bible which are prophetic literature. Certainly, the prophets of the Old Testament (Isaiah through Malachi), though sections of the prophets also include narrative and poetic work. Prophecy also appears in books or sections of books we would identify as narrative (ie. Genesis 12; 2 Samuel 7). The goal of prophecy is twofold: 1) to reveal God's will and 2) to reveal what is to come. The Old Testament prophets sought to remind the people of God's will, for they had forsaken it. The same prophets warned of impending destruction if the people did not repent. Some prophecies can be straightforward and specific; others appear ambiguous or veiled. Some prophetic books (sections of Daniel, Ezekiel, Revelation) are apocalyptic. The word apocalyptic means "to reveal," but typically when spoken of as a style of writing, it presents various images, visions, and dreams which are packed with symbolism (beasts, cosmic activities, numeric imagery, etc.).

Finally, some Biblical literature is called prose discourse. This is the literary style of the epistles. The intent is to present a case through logic and reason focused on changing thought and behaviour. There is no metric structure or rhythm to it. It begins with basic truths and then reasons from that with the addition of pertinent information leading to appropriate conclusions.

Next time...

In our next article, we will start focusing on 8 principles for Biblical hermeneutics. Here are the principles we will discuss moving forward:

1. The importance of words;
2. The nature of truth;
3. The primacy of literal interpretation;
4. The significance of textual context;
5. The importance of historical context;
6. The self-interpreting nature of the Bible;
7. The principle of progressive revelation; and
8. The use of accommodative language.

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Judging Righteously

Michael D. Hickox | Olney, Illinois, USA

Jesus commanded in John seven, *“Don’t judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment”* (verse 24).

Consider some things taught here and in other passages about judging others.

Judging is Necessary - Jesus’ command *“Don’t judge, so that you won’t be judged”* (Matthew 7:1) has become perhaps the most well-known verse in Scripture.

Some claim this teaches we should never judge others. Yet, shortly after this Jesus gave instruction that clearly requires judging others (cf. verse 6, verses 15-16). These commands are among many that imply a *need* for judging others (also see Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20).

More will be said about the context of Matthew 7, but it is clear when looking at the totality of God’s teachings that judging others is at times necessary. Furthermore, when judging is done right, it’s a *good* thing rather than a bad thing.

We Must Judge Fairly - While judging is a good thing when done right, it can do great harm when done wrong. A key to avoid judging wrongly is to judge others with fairness.

In the John 7 passage, Jesus preceded His command to judge righteously with an illustration of how the Jewish leaders weren’t doing that (see verses 21-23). They judged Jesus *unfairly*, failing to consider relevant facts.

We must not make false or careless accusations against others, but instead fairly consider available facts.

We Must Judge According to God’s Commands - Furthermore, when we judge others’ righteousness, we should do so according to God’s commands, and not according to the opinions of *man*. As James 4:12 teaches, “There is one lawgiver,” and we are not Him.

Notice what the Holy Spirit through Paul said in Romans 14:3: “Don’t let him who eats despise him who doesn’t eat. Don’t let him who doesn’t eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.”

The context of this command deals with things that in themselves are morally neutral. If God neither requires nor forbids something, we have no right to accuse someone of sin because he or she chooses a different option than us.

If we judge someone as guilty of sin, it must be something God defines as sin and not merely based on our own opinions of what we feel is wrong.

We Must Not Judge Hypocritically - Something else that is involved in judging righteously is to not judge hypocritically.

This takes us back to the passage in which Jesus said *“Don’t judge, so that you won’t be judged”* (Matthew 7:1). The point Jesus was making in the passage is driven home in verse 5: *“You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother’s eye.”*

It can be much easier to see faults in others than to see the faults in one's own life (cf. 2 Samuel 12:5-7), but we should *foremost* focus on things we ourselves need to correct.

We Must Judge with Love - Another point concerning judging that is inferred in Scripture is that judging should be done with love (1 Corinthians 16:14). When judging others, the goal should not be to gossip, exalt ourselves, or "tear someone down." Rather, the goal should be to please God and benefit other(s), including, when appropriate, the one guilty of sin. Galatians 6:1 teaches the need to point out faults "in a spirit of gentleness." This will be much easier if we have the love and humility we should. Avoiding *hypercritical* judging will also be much easier if we have the love and humility we should.

Perhaps part of the reason judging is viewed negatively is because it is often done unrighteously. The answer to this is not to assume that judging is bad, but to do our part to ensure we judge rightly.

God's revelation thoroughly equips us to do this. May we heed His instruction and "**judge righteous judgment.**"

Who Are Your Friends?

Ethan Jennings | Olney, Illinois, USA

1 Corinthians 15:33 states, "*Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.*" There are only a few words in this verse, but they speak much truth. The world has a way of influencing others. I've seen folks affected by all sorts of sins just by hanging out in the world. Everything from course jesting (Ephesians 5:4) to fornication (Hebrews 13:4) and many other things have influenced Christians to the point that they fall away.

I'm sorry to see Christians influenced by the world because they fail to understand the actual danger there is in it. The words of James 4:4 ring clearly in the statement, "*You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*" One can't have both the world and God. A choice must be made.

The Psalmist said it best:

"How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law, he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:1-4).

Letting the Bible – the word of God – influence us rather than wickedness is something we should consider.

Some people argue, "I'm trying to convert these folks." This is the right attitude to have. However, if one gets influenced into sinfulness, one will inevitably be influenced to do evil. It will ultimately result in one losing his soul. There is a time to move on. Even Jesus said in Matthew 7:6, "*Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.*"

This is not to say do not attempt to convert folks at your job, school, or elsewhere. That's needed! The question that we need to ask ourselves in those situations is who is influencing whom?

But Whom Say Ye That I Am?

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

For centuries unbelievers have tried to take the middle ground with Jesus and call him just a good man. They admire his teaching, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, but deny He is the Son of God. With Jesus there is no middle ground. Jesus Himself declared, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he

who does not gather with Me scatters” (Luke 11:23).

This is because with Christ, unlike with other great teachers, one cannot separate the teaching from the teacher. Buddha stated, “It doesn’t matter whether you remember me or not; remember my teachings, Remember the way, the truth.” The contrast with Jesus is stark. To the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem He boldly asserted, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). Not only did he claim He existed before Abraham did - and Abraham walked the earth approximately 20 centuries before Jesus - He applied the unique name by which God revealed Himself to Moses (“I AM”, Exodus 3:13-14) to describe His prior existence. He claimed to be the only way to God (John 14:6).

One cannot separate the teaching of Christ from His person and claims. *“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day”* (John 12:48). **Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, or He is NOT a good man. Why?**

Jesus of Nazareth claimed equality with God.

“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working. Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God’ (John 5:17-18).

He wasn’t merely A son of God but **THE** Son of God (Matthew 16:16). Jesus referred to God as His Father over 100 times in the gospel accounts but never in the same sense God was the Father of His disciples. He commanded Mary, *“Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God’”* (John 20:17). He claimed unique, unshared Sonship. *“All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him”* (Matthew 11:27-30).

He claimed: to forgive sins (Mark 2:1-12), to have eternal existence (John 8:24, 28, 56-59), to be God (John 10:30-33), and to see Him is to see God (John 14:7-10). Thus, He is either the Christ or a blasphemer.

He accepted worship. Jesus taught that only God should be worshiped (Matthew 4:10). But He accepted worship (Matthew 8:2-3; 9:18-19; 14:33; 15:25; John 9:35-38). After His resurrection His disciples worshiped Him (Matthew 28:9-10; cf. Acts 10:25-26). Thus, he is either the Christ or an impudent pretender.

He claimed sinlessness. His disciples plainly admitted they were sinners (1 Timothy 1:15; Luke 5:8; 1 John 1:8-10). He condemned self-righteousness (Luke 18:9-14). But Jesus boldly challenged the Jews, *“Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?”* (John 8:46) Thus, He is either the Christ or an hypocrite.

Jesus claimed to be the Savior of the world. He asserted He is the light of the world (John 8:12), and “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Thus, He is either the Christ or a liar and an impostor.

He claimed to offer Himself for man’s sins. He claimed His blood would remove the guilt of sin (Matthew 20:28; 26:28). Thus, He is either the Christ or a fanatic.

He claimed to be Christ. He confessed Himself to be the “Christ, the Son of the Blessed” (Mark 14:61-64). Thus, He is either the Christ or the great deceiver (Matthew 27:62-63).

There is no middle ground with Christ. **Either He is the Christ, the Son of God, or He is not a good man** (Luke 11:23) Who do you say that Jesus is?

Introduction to Numbers

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Author

Moses wrote the book of Numbers (1:1).

Name

The book receives its name from the "numberings" (censuses) of Israel recorded in the book. The first census was of the original generation which left Egypt, who perished in the wilderness (chapters 1-4). The second census was of their children, the succeeding generation, which took Canaan (chapter 26).

Audience

Numbers was primarily written to Israel (15:1-2).

Theme

The theme of the book of Numbers is The Wilderness Wanderings of Israel (14:26-35).

Purpose

The primary purpose of Numbers was to prepare Israel for the conquest of Canaan (14:31). However, the events recorded therein are a solemn warning to God's people in every generation of the danger of falling away (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Hebrews 3:7-19). Of 603,550 men, "from twenty years old and above - all ... able to go to war in Israel, "except from the tribe of Levi (1:2-3; 2:32-33), only two men, Joshua and Caleb, were allowed to enter Canaan (26:64-65). The overthrow of Israel in the wilderness stands as a mute but emphatic warning of the possibility of apostasy.

Outline

- I. Preparation for the Journey (at Mt. Sinai) - 1:1 - 10:10
 - A. The First Census - chapter 1
 - B. Organization for the Journey - chapters 2 - 4
 - C. Laws of Purity & Vows - chapters 5 - 6
 - D. Offerings for the Leaders - chapter 7
 - E. Service at the Tabernacle - chapter 8
 - F. The Supplementary Passover - 9:1-14
 - G. Cloud & Trumpets for the Journey - 9:15 - 10:10
- II. Journeys (Mt. Sinai to the Plains of Moab, the Wilderness Wanderings) - 10:11 - 21:35
 - A. Departure - 10:11-36
 - B. The Failure of a Generation - chapters 11-14
 - C. The Death of a Generation (38 years of wandering) - chapters 15 - 21
 - D. Preparation for Conquest (in the Plains of Moab) - chapters 22 - 36
 - 1. Baalam & Balak - chapters 22 - 25
 - 2. The Second Census - chapter 26
 - 3. Additional Laws - chapters 27 - 30
 - 4. Final Preparation - chapters 31 - 36



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