

THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE BIBLE

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II Timothy 3:1-17 — "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be . . . ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth . . . men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith . . ."

Throughout that part of Paul's second letter to Timothy which is our Scripture for today we have the Apostle saying to the young minister: "There will be resistance to the truth and there will be subtle deceptions. Things are going to get bad. But you know the truth, Timothy. And you know from whom you learned it. In view of the coming danger make sure that you do one thing: *preach the Word*. They will not want to listen, but see to it that you get it across. *Preach the Word*."

THE BIBLE IS THE WORD

We of the twentieth century are not the first to use the Scriptures. In Bible times they used the Scriptures. In the Bible the authority of the law, the writings, the message of the Scriptures is described by a simple phrase: *Thus saith the Lord*. That is what the Bible thinks of the Bible: *Thus saith the Lord*.

Throughout the history of the Christian Church believers have affirmed — sometimes at great risk — that this is *the Word of God*. When you go to church the minister opens the Book and says, "Let us hear the Word of God." The Bible itself supports that view of itself.

God made known to men His will and His ways. He came to them as the Word of God. That Word was written in the Bible. It was incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ. And in many respects whatever you say about the Lord Jesus Christ you can say about the Bible.

"As many as received Him to them gave He the power to become the sons of God" — this was spoken of Jesus of Nazareth; it is equally true of the Scriptures that you hold in your hands. Just as He was in body and flesh the *incarnate* Word of God, so the Scriptures are in their written form the *literate* Word of God.

The same criticisms which were leveled against Jesus of Nazareth can be leveled against this Book. Just as His enemies did not know who He was, so His enemies do not know what this Book is. There were some in the days of His flesh who thought of Him strictly as a man and dealt with Him as such. So today there are those who think of this as a human book and deal with it as such. In the days, of His flesh men did not hesitate to arrest Him, put Him on a cross and kill Him. Today men do not hesitate to criticize, pull apart and seek to destroy this Book. God allowed men to kill the Lord's body and God allows men to tear apart His Book. But God raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and God makes this Book to have His very power.

This is the Word of God.

The Bible is the "seed" that produces Christians. This truth can be demonstrated quite simply: In the world there are areas where the Bible is not found — in those areas there are no Christians. And in the world there are areas where the Bible is to be found — in those areas there are Christians.

To be sure not every man with a Bible is a Christian: in the Lord's parable not all of the seed bore fruit; some fell by the wayside and took no root. But it was still the seed — the Word of God.

Throughout the Old Testament the messengers of God — prophets, priests, kings — had one

common testimony to give over and over: *Thus saith the Lord*. When Jesus of Nazareth came, He repeated the refrain, *Thus saith the Lord*.

Satan tempted Him in the wilderness with a warped interpretation of the Word which was different from God's intention (just as he had tempted Eve with a warped interpretation of the Word which she had received), and Jesus Christ answered him, "It is written!" When Satan offered to argue the point, using Scripture even, the Lord Jesus answered, "It is written again!" — setting up that basic principle which cannot be bettered: The broader truth comes when you compare Scripture with Scripture.

Mark it well: The Lord Jesus never stepped outside of Scripture when facing Satan. He took the written Old Testament Word and although He was God in human form (and if anyone could have spoken *ad lib* on the subject of the will of God He could have) when facing Satan He set the pattern which is our guide to this day: *He quoted Scripture*.

While our Lord was here upon earth as Jesus of Nazareth He made such statements as this with reference to the Scriptures: "Not one jot nor one tittle shall pass away till all be fulfilled." To get the force of that comment, translate it into modern English: "Not the dotting of an 'i' nor the crossing of a 't' will be changed." I want to emphasize this because when the Lord Jesus laid emphasis upon the Word of God He meant the *spoken* Word which had been *written*: the *Scriptures*.

In Gethsemane, when Peter tried to defend the Lord Jesus against the mob coming to arrest Him, the Lord Jesus turned on Peter and said, "But how else shall the Scriptures be fulfilled?"

After the resurrection, when the Lord walked the road to Emmaus with the two disciples, He "opened their understanding of the Scriptures." If anyone could have helped them out of their confusion and sorrow with a *new* word of wisdom and insight He could have. But He helped them by opening their understanding of the Scriptures.

Throughout those forty days before the Ascension we are told that in His appearances to His disciples, "He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures; and beginning at Moses, and in the Psalms, and prophets. He expounded to them all things concerning Himself."

Let me say it again: When the Living Lord Jesus Christ wanted to make plain the significance of His resurrection, He took the Bible, opened it and gave its meaning."

Paul carried on the same procedure. When he stood before Felix, the governor, he said, "I confess unto thee that after the manner they call heresy so worship I the God of my fathers, *believing all things that are written in the law and the prophets*." So far as you and I are concerned, that pretty well wraps it up. It should help when someone today proposes to give us a "better view."

And don't forget James. When the early Church was meeting its first great problem and the apostles and elders were assembled in Jerusalem, it was James who settled the issue with words like these: "To this (the testimony of Peter) agree the words of the prophets" — and on that basis the problem was solved. There was nothing else to be said after it had been established that it was that way in the Bible.

GOD LETS THIS WORD BE QUESTIONED

In the wisdom of God He has permitted His revealed Word to be questioned. He has permitted untrue interpretations to be given, thus demanding of men that they choose whether they will obey the Word or not.

In the beginning Satan questioned the Word of God when he said to Eve, "Yea, hath God said?" And he argued a different interpretation of what God had said. The argument was so plausible that Eve was deceived and she disobeyed God. She was deceived by one who used the Word of God to convey a

"better," "more plausible" view of what God had said.

At this point I want to read a few verses from Deuteronomy (and remember, I didn't write this): "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder (*he actually demonstrates something impressive*), and the sign or the wonder comes to pass (*he can actually produce results*) saying 'Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known' (*let's take a new look at the relevancy of religion*) ; Thou shall not hearken unto the words of that prophet . . . for the Lord your God proveth you (*is testing you*) to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul . . . And that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death (*he shall be utterly repudiated*) because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God" (13:1-5).

It is sobering to read passages like that because they suggest that the temptation to turn from the Word of God can be subtle and dangerous — some false prophets are able to produce "signs," that is, they can actually demonstrate a sort of power which is impressive! And if you do not have your hand firmly on the Word of God you can be led astray.

Remember Joshua? During the conquest of Canaan there came men from Gibeon to Joshua, claiming to be from a far country; and they exhibited tattered clothing and worn shoes and mouldy bread — but they were really from nearby. The Bible tells us that Joshua took the evidence at hand — real evidence, but *manufactured* evidence — and "asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord" (Jos. 9:14). He made a deal, without checking the Word of God, and it was a mistake.

One of the saddest stories in the Old Testament is that of the young prophet who was sent to prophesy against Jeroboam (I Kings, 13). The Lord had told the young prophet to go on his mission but not to stop in the land to eat and drink or even to rest himself. But on his way home the young prophet met up with an old prophet who enticed him to turn aside out of his way and thus disobey the Lord. The old prophet led the young one astray by saying, "I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the Word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house." Then the Bible goes on to say: ". . . *but he lied unto him.*"

The ending of the story finds the young man dead. He died because he believed the old prophet against the Word which he had received from God.

Does this story have an application today? Indeed it does. Here is a believer. He has a Word from God — the Scriptures. He takes the Word and he presents it as it is given. But another believer — perhaps a minister — comes to the young believer and says kindly: "I am a servant of the Lord, too. And I think I am a man of faith too. But I have an insight which makes it unnecessary to take that strict view of the Scriptures which you are taking." And the young believer can be led astray.

I think it was something like this that Paul had in mind when he said to young Timothy: "Let no man despise thy youth!" That is, let no man talk you into compromising your faith. And to all men, whether young or old I think the Apostle would say, "It's not your Word, it's not my Word, it is God's Word! I have no right to change it, to alter it. I am a messenger, bearing a message. If the message is not what I want I have no right to modify it."

Let me remind you that it was the Lord Jesus Christ who gave more warning about faithfulness than anyone else in the Bible. It was He who said, "Beware of false prophets," and "Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing," and "Take heed lest any man deceive you."

It was He who said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father and the daughter against her mother and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."

Remember the parable of the sower? (Matt. 13:24-26.) Jesus Christ said the Kingdom of heaven could

be compared to a situation in which a man sowed good seed in a field but an enemy came along later and sowed weeds . . . *while he slept*.

Remember what our Lord said about His little ones? (Matt. 18:6): "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." The meaning is clear . . . and chilling. Anyone who misleads, or hurts, or causes one of God's little ones to stumble will have the Lord Jesus Christ Himself to deal with.

In what ways are God's little ones "offended" these days? In many ways. Have you noticed how Bible reading and Bible study have been discouraged of late? How many times have you heard a devotional which consisted of some poem or some quotation from some human author? How many times have you listened to a sermon based on some novel or some technical treatise instead of Scripture?

How long has it been since you have heard a sermon on the story of Adam? On the fall of man? On the flood as the judgment of God? On the Virgin Birth? On the substitutionary atonement? On the necessity of being born again? On hell? On sin as an offense "against the justice of God? On the necessity of holiness? On the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? On the present intercession of Christ? On the personal reality of the Holy Spirit? On the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ? On the destruction of the world?

You might be surprised how many good members of the Church believe that ideas such as those above belong mostly to the "sect" groups. Quite possibly most of the people who sit in so-called Christian churches today would think that the idea of the Lord Jesus Christ coming again in bodily form to the earth was just a bit queer.

I remember once reading a certain passage on the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to a certain Bible class — with shocking effect. Some of the class were astonished that anyone in my position would take such a view as the one I read. Some of my close friends in the audience were uncomfortable when I finished. They were not sure just which strange direction my teaching might take next. And then I told them what I had read the preamble to the Larger Catechism of the Confession of Faith. Look it up for yourself and see if that is what *you* believe.

THIS WORD MUST GO OUT PURE . . . AND WHOLE

This Word of God about which we have been speaking must go out pure . . . and whole.

Our physical lives are nourished by food. But it is possible to process food in such a way that certain essential vitamins are left out and the food does not nourish. If you feed people with such food it will not produce health in those who eat it.

Milton it was who long ago spoke of the "hungry sheep" who "look up and are not fed." Today, in Christendom, many, many people are spiritually anemic because they have not been fed the Word of God. It isn't their fault. They have eaten what was laid on the table before them. But the formula prepared for them omitted essential spiritual elements. And so they are spiritually anemic.

Souls today are dying of a sort of spiritual scurvy because they are not getting what they need to live; what they would get if those who fed them would take the Scriptures as they are, pure and whole.

But someone will say, "Such thoughts are depressing. All this has the flavor of heresy-hunting!"

So I would challenge you all to a sober sense of responsibility about this matter. Think of it this way: Gardens are wonderful to have and from them we get our food. But weeds are real and there is no garden without them. In order to have a healthy garden you must deal with the weeds. And there is no way to

deal with weeds but to hoe them out. The gardener who has a fruitful garden is the one who does a lot of hoeing!

We live in a world which requires purity, cleanliness, antisepsis. Isn't it strange that we can demand absolute purity of food before we will eat it — yet are willing to put up with anything at all with respect to the health of the soul?

In engineering there is an essential intolerance of error. Every measurement must be absolutely precise. In medicine there is no room for infection. Any hospital worth going to will take extreme measures to protect against infection. Yet in the spiritual life just any teaching of the Bible is good enough.

Someone may say, "If things are as bad as you indicate, what can we do?"

Things *are* as bad as I have indicated, and it's going to get worse. The Bible says, "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." But the Bible also says, "Remember . . . the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Error is so wide-spread, wrong ideas are so many that no man can cope with it all. No man has the time or the strength or the wisdom or the understanding to deal with all the wrong ideas current in any age.

But we do not cope with error by countering all the wrong ideas. We cope with error by *preaching the Word*. You may say, "I'm not a preacher!" Oh yes you are. If you are a Christian you are a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the sword of the Spirit — your instrument of witness — is the Word of God.

Get the content of the Bible into your heart and mind and share that content with those with whom you have to deal. There will be questions about words and ideas and whether it isn't necessary to have "a better grasp" of Scripture than is suggested by the bare understanding of the text. Don't be upset. Just get the Bible across. Tell the story of the Garden of Eden. There will be questions and more questions — just get the story across: God told Adam and Eve what to do and they didn't do it; they were judged. Get that across.

Tell the story of Cain and Abel. Someone will want to raise questions. Answer them if you can but if you cannot, just get the story across the way it is told: Cain was jealous of Abel and he killed him. They were brothers. They came from the same background, the same environment, but one killed the other. And God dealt with Cain.

Go through the whole Bible. No part of it is unimportant. Every part contains matter of vital importance for an understanding of God, of man, of God's will for man. Take it the way it is, saturate your mind and heart with it and then pour it out.

Preach the Word! God will bless it.