



The Tablet of Cursing

Gary L. Hill

One of the challenges for Christians today is answering the skeptics of the Bible. Many books, articles, and TV specials have been produced saying the Bible, as an ancient book, is incorrect in some of its statements concerning historical events. As believers we have confidence in the Bible story as Paul expressed it in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." This would mean that when the Bible speaks on any subject, it is correct and trustworthy. Many archaeological discoveries over the years have shown that this is the case. Last month, another conformation of the Bible's truth and correctness has been reported.

Brother Wayne Jackson has expressed the importance of the study of Bible Archaeology for the serious Bible student in this way: "The science of archaeology has been a multiple benefactor to the Bible student. Archaeology has: (1) Aided in the identification of biblical places and in the establishment of biblical dates; (2) Assisted in our understanding of ancient customs and obscure language idioms; (3) Shed new light on numerous biblical words; (4) Enhanced our understanding of certain points of New Testament doctrine; (5) Progressively silenced the infidel critics of the inspired word of God" (Jackson, *Biblical Studies in the Light of Archaeology*, 4-5).

A small, folded lead tablet was discovered on Mt Ebal dated 3,200 years ago. This is where the children of Israel entered the land at the beginning of the settlement. In Joshua 8:30 we read where Joshua, during the conquest of Canaan, built an altar to God on Mt. Ebal. This February I was able to see the altar and visit Mt. Ebal. This is where the find was discovered. We were thrilled to hear the report that a curse tablet had been found there. The report concerned a tablet that had the curse that Joshua spoke to Israel at that site. It was announced by archaeologist Dr. Scott Stripling.

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When Tradition becomes “Truth”

Andy Erwin



During the earthly ministry of Christ, two groups were shrouded in controversy, the Pharisees and Sadducees. The two groups are forever linked in Jewish political history and religious reform, the crucifixion of the Savior, and the persecution of the church in the first century. Their very names are reproachful to the Christian and synonymous with hypocrisy and vain religious tradition.

The Pharisees

The sect of the Pharisees “was one of the most ancient and most considerable among the Jews, and its origin is not very well known, some placing the beginning of the Pharisees sooner, others later.”¹

They were deemed “separatists.” (Unger, 1982, p. 854) The Pharisees would have been determined to avoid any type of impurity proscribed by the Levitical law – or, more specifically, their strict interpretation of it.²

According to Paul they were the straightest sect of the Jewish religion (Acts 26:5). “They called themselves *Habermim* (Aramaic *Habar*, *associate*) ...meaning one who associates himself with the law in order to observe it strictly in opposition to the encroachments of Hellenism.”³

Oral/Spoken Tradition

The movement failed to please God as they began esteeming oral tradition to be as great as the written law. Therefore, the Lord continued to ask them, “Have you not read?” (cf. Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42) Jesus was clearly placing a greater emphasis upon what was written

rather than the oral tradition of their fathers.

The Pharisees and scribes observed and perpetuated an oral tradition of laws handed down from the former teachers and wise men of Israel. This oral law, or Halakah, was highly venerated by the Pharisees and scribes. They taught that it had been handed down from Moses and was to be given the same respect as the written laws of the Pentateuch.⁴

Their traditions had caused the Pharisees to transgress the commandment of God (Matthew 15:4); make the commandment of God of void (v.6); become hypocrites (v.7); have hearts far from God (v.8); offer vain worship (v.9).

The Sadducees

The Sadducees had gained some prominence during the 400-year period between the Old and New Testaments. Rather than oppose Hellenism, they embraced it. This would effectively taint their influence as a religious authority among the Jews. Religiously speaking:

...the Sadducees were literal in handling the Old Testament Law and resisted the “new” ideas and traditions of the Pharisees. Politically and socially, they were open to rapprochement with Hellenistic (Greek) culture and the Roman political system...In general it seems the Sadducees supported those interpretations and procedures that enhanced the prestige, power, and financial benefit of the priestly temple cult

and the aristocracy. (Scott, 1996, p.700)

When Tradition Becomes “Truth”

Like the Jews during the time of Christ, Christians in the twenty-first century are caught between the two traps of rigid traditionalism being passed down from prior generations and the worldly influences pervading our current society, resulting in a religious system that is based on opinion rather than divine revelation. Both the Christian’s system and virtue of righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees if he is to be acceptable to God and received into heaven (Matthew 5:20). Modern-day Pharisees will exalt the traditions and doctrines of their fathers over the word of God. Modern-day Sadducees will reject the clear teaching of the word to gain an advantage. Both groups serve as examples of what not to be as followers of Christ.

Truth

What is truth? Pilate’s question to Christ is appropriate for our thoughts as well. “Truth” is a word that is used too loosely today. It is too often used to refer to the traditions, practices, doctrines, or opinions of men. Preachers may title a sermon as “the truth about...” and then voice their personal notions and conjectures of how *they* think it ought to be.

¹ Alexander Cruden, *Cruden’s Dictionary of Bible Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958), 210-11.

² Julius Scott Jr., *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 607.

³ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody, 1982), 854.

⁴ R.J. Wyatt, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Rev. ed., Vol. 3), ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 823.

A generation has come and gone since the Lord's church has grown numerically in this country, and yet some of my preaching brethren and their elders still major in minors. A million and one issues could be preached passionately about topics which have no bearing on the soul but stem only from the private feelings of the preacher and/or his elders. When this occurs long enough, and if enough preachers join the fray, tradition will inevitably become "truth."

What is truth? Truth is the word of God (John 17:17), taught by Christ and His holy apostles (John 1:17; Hebrews 2:1-4). Yet there is an atrocious audacity among some brethren to believe that their opinions or spoken traditions received from their fathers is the "truth," to preach it as such, and to bind its heavy burden upon the brethren. Such men see the error of religious tradition when advanced by the sectarian denominations but fail to see the sectarian inevitabilities of their own words and deeds.

G. C. Brewer warned us years ago about the evil we are addressing in this article. He wrote:

Our older brethren did not make the distinctions that we make. They had a much better grasp upon the idea of a nonsectarian church than most of us have. We are far more sectarian than they were. (I am prepared to prove this any day.) The plain fact is that they were better-educated, better-informed, better-balanced men, as a rule, than we are today, as a rule. The cause of this is easily seen. We have ceased to emphasize broad culture and profound Bible knowledge and have exalted men into the position of "big preachers" simply because they can preach a few first-principle sermons and "skin" the sects,

when they are wholly deficient in many other respects. Then jealousy and a sectarian spirit causes these "big preachers" and their admirers to suspect and to disfellowship any man who gets into a field where they are not acquainted, even if that field be nothing but the organization and practical work of a congregation. Think it over, brethren.⁵

Preventing the Problem

Christians can prevent tradition from becoming truth by recognizing when a thing is truly a commandment of the Lord, or a matter of personal judgment. Paul made this distinction regarding his views on marriage (1 Corinthians 7:25). He delineated his personal feelings from the commandments of the Lord. However, in 1 Corinthians 14:37, and the role of women in public worship, he made no such distinction. Paul could separate opinion from truth. He did not allow the lines to be crossed or blurred. We must do the same.

Christians can prevent tradition from becoming truth by recognizing what is a matter of custom and what is a matter of divine law. Paul did this concerning the head covering women wore in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:16). Here is the only passage in the New Testament which addresses specifically dress in worship. Paul spoke of customs, not commandments. We would do well to realize that coats and ties are customs (and sometimes costumes for those pretending to be pious), but they are not commandments.

We quote the old saying about "giving your best to God" like it is found in the Bible. Yet, how many of us truly buy the best suit or the best tie? Do we not buy the suit and tie that is on sale? Are we sinning against God by not buying the very best suit and tie we can afford? You can see

how by my improper inference I have just made the tradition of coats and ties even more burdensome to the believer. But not one word has been said about the cross, the church, or the plan of salvation. Just coats and ties. Rather than being carnal and worrying about a manmade standard for material clothing, let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts (Romans 13:14). Truly, such would entail giving one's best to God.

Brethren, we need to get over ourselves. A man can go to heaven wearing bib overalls to worship as sure as he can by wearing a pair of slacks. A man can go to hell in slacks as sure as he can in overalls! Let us avoid disputes over doubtful things (Romans 14:1) and recognize the difference in matters of personal scruples and the faith once delivered (Romans 15:1; Jude 3).

Too much energy has been wasted in the pulpit on things that do not make any difference for the salvation of the soul. Until we place our focus only what is truly the truth of the gospel, I fear the church in our country will only continue to decline in number and in spirituality and new traditions will become "truth." Brethren, think on these things.



⁵ G. C. Brewer, "More Criticism" in the *Gospel Advocate* (vol. 71, no. 11), 245.



How Much Did They Know?

Robert L. Waggoner

How much does one need to know before obeying the gospel? Sometimes people have said that those three thousand who obeyed the gospel on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37-41) needed to hear only one sermon before they obeyed the gospel. However, that idea is probably a shallow misunderstanding of what really happened. That perception is misleading because it fails to comprehend the natural process of sowing the seed of God's word and cultivating it before an eventual harvest is reaped. That understanding implies that people do not now need to know much to obey the gospel and that we need not make much preparation for presenting the gospel to others. It presumes that local evangelism and mission work in our times ought to produce quick results, and that if they don't, then the presumption may be that the problem lies with the stubbornness of unbelievers or with the inefficiency of evangelists and missionaries.

A better understanding of how much those three thousand believers knew before they obeyed the gospel on the day of Pentecost can be acquired by looking at their historical background. (We don't know their individual names or situations, but we do know the general historical situation out of which they came.) First, those three thousand believers had probably already heard much about Jesus. For several centuries, the Jewish people had been expecting the coming of a Messiah.

Moreover, John the Baptist came to prepare the way for the coming of Christ (Matthew 3:1-3; Mark 1:1-3; Luke 3:1-18; John 1:15-28). John specifically identified Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ (John 1:29-36). When Jesus came, many of the people either thought or wondered if He was the Christ (Luke 3:15; John 4:29, 42; 7:26, 31, 41; 11:27). The teachings and the miracles of Jesus made Him famous throughout all the region of Galilee, Syria, and Judea (Matthew 4:23-24; 9:26, 31; Mark 1:28; Luke 7:16). Would not the fame of Jesus have also spread to other lands? Had not Jesus openly taught for several years among large crowds and multitudes? (No less than thirty-nine times is Jesus declared to be among the multitudes in the Gospel records.) Were not the strange events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion in Jerusalem the talk of the town? (Matthew 27:51-54; Luke 23:44). Would not nearly everyone in Jerusalem have known about Him? (Luke 24:18) In view of all these facts, it seems incredible to think that those who believed and obeyed the gospel on the day of Pentecost had not previously known about Jesus!

Second, many of those three thousand may have personally known Jesus, or at least had some association with Him. Surely many of those who accompanied Jesus in His travels, such as those women who supported Him (Luke 8:3) and others, like Nicodemus (John 3:1-9; 7:50; 19:39),

and Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43, John 19:38) may have been among the three thousand who were obedient to the gospel on the day of Pentecost. Surely there were also some of the relatives and friends of Jesus (John 7:3-10) and His apostles who would have been among the obedient on the day of Pentecost. Many of those whom Jesus had healed during His ministry, such as the man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5), the blind man (John 9), or others [who in some way would have been blessed by His ministry, such as the father of an epileptic son whom Jesus had healed (Matt. 17:14-18)] would possibly have been there. Some of those who had been astonished by His teachings, such as heard His sermon on the mountain (Matthew 7:28-29) or His refutation of the Jews in the temple (Mark 12:35), etc. may have been among the three thousand believers.

Third, many of the three thousand believers may have already believed that Jesus was the Christ before Peter's sermon was given on the day of Pentecost. Certainly some, perhaps many, had already come to believe in Him as a result of His teachings and His miracles (John 8:30; 10:42; 11:45; 12:42).

That many were already well informed about Jesus and had already come to believe in Him as the promised Christ is evident from the gospel records. Even those who came from other countries to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost could easily have heard about Jesus and His teachings and miracle working because of their trips to Jerusalem in previous years.

New proof that Jesus is the Christ was given at Pentecost, however. That new proof was that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. This was substantiated not only by eye-witnesses but also by the miracle of what appeared to be cloven tongues of fire on the apostles' heads and their speaking in foreign languages.

Moreover, on the day of Pentecost, there came to be a new understanding about the nature of the Messiah's kingdom. Whereas it had formerly and commonly been thought of as a temporal, physical, and earthly kingdom, it would now come to be recognized as an eternal, spiritual, and heavenly kingdom.

All these things indicate that probably most, if not all, of those who were baptized on the day of Pentecost had previously known much about Jesus. All they needed was the divine assurance that Jesus was indeed the Christ. This was given to them by the miracles preceding Peter's sermon and by Peter's reasoning from the scriptures that the Christ was prophesied to arise from the dead.

What this means for us is that if we would be fruitful in evangelism, we need to make Jesus Christ known to people. When people realize they are sinners needing salvation and that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who came to redeem people from their sins, many of them will commit themselves to Him just as did those on the day of Pentecost.

An older man once made the observation to me that most preachers have many excellent commentaries in their libraries on the New Testament epistles, but few on the Gospels. He also observed that most preachers spend much more time preaching from the epistles than from the Gospels. He implied that was a mistake. Maybe so! In any case, we generally need more teaching and preaching from the Gospels. People must be strongly committed to the Lord before they will be inclined to feel a strong attachment to His church.




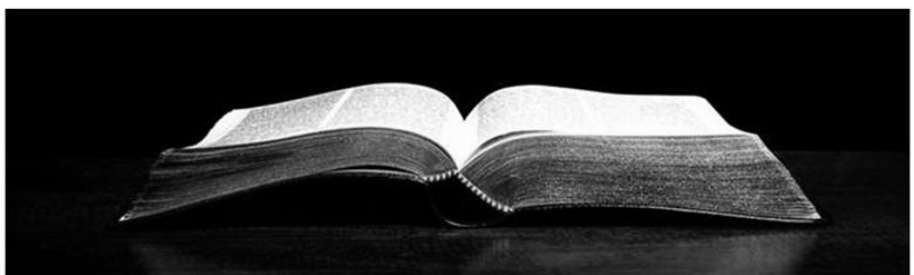
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Preferring the Pagan

Johnny Trail



The book of 2 Kings has an interesting passage regarding the efforts of the Samaritans to syncretize the worship of God with the worship of pagan idols. 2 Kings 17:33-34 says, “So they feared the LORD but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away. To this day they do according to the former manner. They do not fear the LORD, and they do not follow the statutes or the rules or the law or the commandment that the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel.”

These passages are very telling when people must decide about following God or pagan idols. Sadly, these inhabitants of Samaria decided to follow the pagan gods—the very objects of their captivity. Along with these considerations, God’s people are continually making decisions about the nature of their devotion. This was true in the Old Testament, and it is true today.

As Joshua and company prepared to enter the promised land, they were asked to decide about their loyalties – whether to Jehovah God or paganism. Joshua 24:15 says, “And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

While the people initially determined that following Yahweh was the appropriate course of action, their history reveals something very different. Joshua 24:24 says, “And the people said to Joshua, ‘The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!’” Yet they did not remain faithful to the covenant promises that they pledged themselves to abide by daily.

During the ministry of Jesus, He perceived the allurements of power and money that attracted humankind, especially among the Pharisees and various members of the Sanhedrin. While these things were not the same as carving a piece of material and calling it “god,” there are similarities between the concepts.

Jesus understood the impossibility of serving two masters. Luke 16:13-14 says, “‘No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.’ Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.” The truth of these words has not changed in the two thousand years of intervening time.

These latter passages underscore one of the major problems among the Pharisees – they had a divided loyalty. They pretended to be adherents to the Old Testament law, but status and greed influenced much of their motivations. As history indicates, the

office of the high priest (a *de facto* member of the Sanhedrin) became corrupt. The office of the high priesthood was inherited according to the Old Covenant, but kings during the Hellenistic occupation removed and appointed priests for bribes and political favors. This corruption leavened many of those from the pharisaical tradition.

Sadly, contemporary Christians want to combine elements of the world with their Christian walk. Scripture makes it plain that there can be no conformity with the world and true transformation into the image of Christ. Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

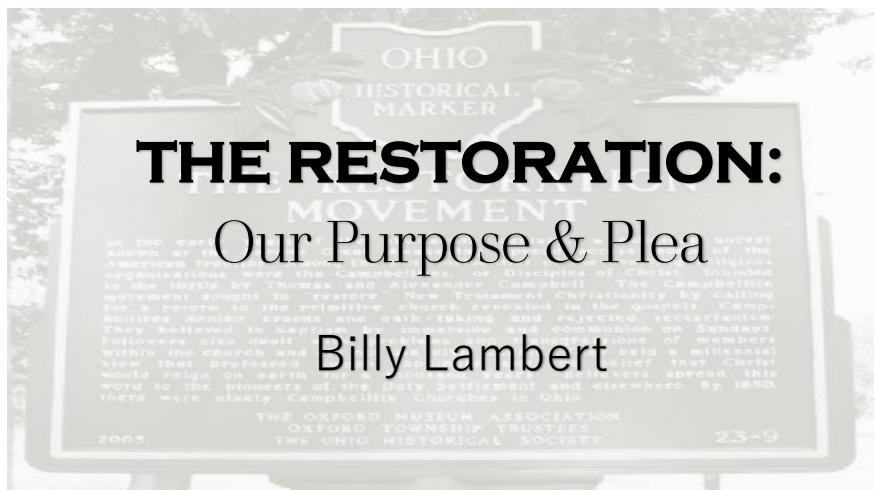
At various points, the people of God will be forced to make difficult decisions. If those choices are influenced by worldly considerations, it is feared that the influences of the carnal will overtake spiritual factors. Mark 4:18-19 says, “Now these are the ones sown among thorns; *they are* the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

When one reconsiders the ending of 2 Kings 34, it becomes evident that this principle was meted out regarding Old Testament Jewish people when it says, “To this

day they do according to the former manner. They do not fear the LORD, and they do not follow the statutes or the rules or the law or the commandment that the LORD..." Simply stated, God lost, and paganism won out in the end.

One would hope that nothing like this would ever happen with a Christian, but scripture indicates that it does. 2 Timothy 4:10 says, "For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica – Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia." How many times has the world won out when spiritual considerations conflict with the allurements of our culture?

Just as the audience of 2 Kings 34 ended up preferring the pagan, some in our age are slouching in the same direction. To guard against this tendency, we must fill ourselves with Christ and all things spiritual. We need to crave things that are divine in nature. Matthew 5:6 says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." If we are filled with these things and crave them, there will be no space for the cares of the world in our lives.



When Moses was given the details for the construction of the tabernacle, he was told to build it according to the pattern that had been given unto him on the mount (Exodus 25:1-9). There is a pattern in the New Testament for the church. Only by following this pattern can we have first-century Christianity in the twenty-first century. It was because of the eager desire and sincere aim of good men to follow the pattern of the New Testament that the Restoration movement of the nineteenth century became reality. Efforts at Restoration must not be confused with the Reformation movement. The leaders of the Protestant Reformation had as their aim the reformation of the Roman Catholic Church, while those who took lead in the Restoration movement were motivated to restore the New Testament church, not reform an apostasy.

This effort at restoration is well illustrated by an accident that happened in the gold rush days in California. A group of men became separated from their party, and they thought they would die because of the lack of water. Suddenly they came upon a stream of sparkling water. When they began to drink from it, they found it bitter to the taste. To say the least, they were disappointed. One man went upstream and found the fountain from which the stream was flowing. When he drank of the water, it was sweet and good to the

taste. He couldn't understand how something so good and sweet at the fountain could be so bitter on down the stream. He soon discovered side streams that poured into the mainstream that brought the bitter water and corrupted the stream. He took the party back to the beginning of the stream, and there their thirst was quenched.

In the twenty-first century, the religious world is woefully divided into several hundred different bodies, or churches, and many people wonder, "What is Christianity?" Millions of us believe in Christ; yet the power of Christianity is nullified by the divisions that exist. We must achieve the unity with which the church began. We must return to the fountain head of truth, which is the word of God, and restore the church as it was before the waters were made bitter by human doctrines and creeds.

The distinctive feature of the church of Christ is its endeavor to restore New Testament Christianity. Its plea is to restore the church of the New Testament. Churches of Christ throughout the world are calling upon honest, truth-seeking men and women to return to the Bible. We must "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16). A failure to walk according to divine truth is

to plunge into moral and spiritual darkness. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). The apostle Peter wrote, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11). We must speak where the Bible speaks. We must be silent where the Bible is silent.

Churches of Christ have made the plea to restore the New Testament plan of salvation. The New Testament teaches that upon hearing the gospel one must believe in Christ. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). The

scriptures further are found to teach that one must repent of his sins. “I tell you nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

One must also confess Christ before men (Matthew 10:32-33). An example of this is to be found in Acts 8 where the man from Ethiopia said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). If the New Testament plan of salvation is restored, then baptism for the remission of sins must be taught and practiced. On the day of Pentecost Peter told those who inquired, “What shall we do?” to “repent and be baptized...for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

The work of the church must also be restored. Its work is threefold: (1) evangelism (Matthew 28:18-20); (2) benevolence

(Galatians 6:10); (3) edification (Acts 20:32). Also, in restoring New Testament Christianity, Bible things must be called by Bible names. Individually, God’s people are called Christians (Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Collectively, they are called “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16), “church of God” (Acts 20:28), “house of God” (1 Timothy 3:15), and “church of the first born” (Hebrews 12:23).

We have not outgrown the plea to restore the New Testament church. We should endeavor to restore the church of the Bible in every generation. Inasmuch as we are never more than one generation away from apostasy, we must continue to call men back to the Bible.

“Pastors, Not Preachers”: A Critical Look at the Current Organization of Some Churches of Christ

Jackson Erwin

Every gospel preacher I have ever met has either had or heard this conversation at some point in their life. Someone will ask them, “Where do you work?” and they will respond “At the _____ church of Christ.” “Oh, so you’re the pastor!” Then, the conversation will either go one or two ways: either he will excuse the mistake and just say “yes,” or he will say something along the lines of “No, I’m just the preacher. The title ‘pastor’ really belongs to our elders.”

This explanation is not unbiblical by any means, but have we ever seriously considered why we are so commonly asked this? Moreover, have we ever

wondered why *our own members* sometimes refer to their preachers as “pastors” without merely ascribing it to biblical ignorance? Or is there something about the work of elders and preachers that we have either missed or strayed from over the years that has turned our preachers into unnamed “pastors?”

“Located” Preachers

Several decades ago, churches of Christ went into a debate concerning the scriptural authority of located preachers. One of the more well-known of these discussions was the Dehoff-Garrett debate. While I disagree with the overall assumption of our non-institutional brethren—that

located preachers are unscriptural—there is some degree of truth to be found in the error. What truth might be seen in these debates? That some (if not many) of our congregations have unknowingly embraced an unbiblical view concerning the work of elders and preachers. Specifically, that our preachers today have become semi-pastors, while our elders have taken on the form of a “Board of Directors” which has delegated their work and responsibilities to a preacher.

Of all there is to love about churches of Christ, one of the most commendable is our adherence to the authority and sufficiency of the Bible. The desire to do

“Bible things in Bible ways” is not something to give up. However, when we find ourselves embracing doctrines and methods that are not biblical, true Christians will seek to change rather than argue, “This is how we’ve always done it.” But what might we have missed about preachers and elders? How have we changed in our ecclesiology over the years? To answer these questions, we must first go the Bible and learn what it says about the work of elders and preachers, compare it to our present practice, and see where the differences are.

The Work of Elders

Elders—also known as bishops/overseers (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1; Tit. 1:7) or pastors/shepherds (Eph. 4:11; used as a verb in Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2)—are given several tasks by their Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4) as they lead, oversee, and care for His church. As we examine these tasks, one will quickly realize that they sound like the work of our modern preacher—which should cause us to see why there is such a common confusion between pastors and preachers.

First, elders are commanded to *teach the church of God*. Rather than delegating their preaching and teaching responsibilities to others, they are to take an active part in the education of their flock. When Paul traveled to Miletus, he called for the Ephesian elders and told them to “feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28). The apostle said this after having preached for them previously (with the goal of training up and appointing elders). He did not tell them to find another preacher to fill in his place, but to feed the church *themselves*. This is much along the lines of Peter’s call for his fellow elders to “shepherd the church of God” (1 Pet. 5:2). Of course, this does not mean that preachers are not allowed to teach the church but that elders should have an active part in it.

The writer of Hebrews told his audience, “Remember your leaders (the elders), those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7). Additionally, elders were so active in teaching the church that Paul said they needed to be compensated for it (1 Tim. 5:17-18). In a sense, they were the “full-time preachers” of the primitive congregations!

Ephesians 4:11-16 discusses God’s equipping the church with people who can build it up and bring it together. In verse 11, Paul lists those to whom God has given this responsibility. “He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, *the pastor-teachers* to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” While many English translations render this last group “pastors and teachers” the fact that there is only one article before them implies they are the same people. If not, the language at the very least implies that teaching and being a pastor are very closely related.

In addition to teaching the church publicly, elders are called to *protect the church from sin, doctrinal error, and false teachers*. Paul warned the Ephesian elders to guard the church from wolves who would secretly creep in from among them (Acts 20:29-31). That is, they needed to be alert and active in teaching their flock to protect them from false teaching that would come from other elders. This once again falls in line with God equipping the church with pastor-teachers “so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph. 4:14; cf. Tit. 1:9-13). Notice once more that elders are not called to hire someone to do the watching, warning, and admonishing *for them*, but are to do the work themselves.

A third duty of the eldership is that, as shepherds, *they are to council their flock in spiritual, physical, and relational trials*. They are said to be “keeping watch” over the souls of their flock (Heb. 13:17). Yet, in the context of the local church today, who do we know that does the bulk of counseling, visiting, and marital training? Who are the ones getting degrees in counseling so they can improve their work in the church? Is it not the preacher? In the first century, elders were called upon when their members were sick so they could care and pray over them (Jas. 5:13-15). But is it not the preacher who is on speed-dial and expected to do the majority of visiting in some of our congregations? Again, this is not to say preachers should not visit. It is every Christian’s duty. This is simply to say that delegating the work of visiting to one man in the church is not the aim of a biblical elder.

The fourth and final responsibility of an elder is to *lead the church*. Some, though certainly not all, elders mistakenly think that to lead the church means to *rule the church*. Such men believe that leadership means they are the “bosses,” the preacher is their “employee,” and the members are their “customers.” However, Paul’s use of the term “rule” (1 Tim. 5:17) does not imply a religious dictatorship. The Greek term would be better translated “to manage” or “to direct” the church in the biblical way it should go (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Specifically, elders lead the church by their example (Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:3) and by their teaching (Acts 20:28; 1 Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:7; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; Tit. 1:7). They are not called to lead *behind* a preacher. They are not to lead by telling the preacher how they want *him* to lead. Nor are they to lead by *force, fear, and intimidation*. As their qualifications demonstrate, elders are to be the ideal examples of Christian living. Christ calls them to lead, teach, visit, and counsel as He Himself did.

If you are a preacher, an elder, a deacon, or a member, consider the biblical description of the eldership and ask yourself, “Is my congregation upholding the ancient pattern?” “Am I, as an elder, teaching the church regularly, counseling my flock, visiting the sick and wayward, and leading by a godly example of humility and patience?” “Am I, as a preacher, taking on more responsibility than God has called me to? Has the nature of my work made me a pastor in everything but name? Have I been a faithful minister in calling this to my eldership’s attention?”

Thanks be to God for men who have conformed to the biblical standard! For those of you who have elders who teach, preach, visit, council, and lead as true shepherds and caretakers of God’s flock, be sure to encourage them and thank them for their work! They are some of the finest men you can ever and will ever know.

As a movement which embraces biblical patterns, offices, and reform, we need to address the problem of the preacher-pastor and the elder-director and call upon congregations to come to a closer adherence to scripture.

Moving on from the Bible’s description of the work of elders, what is there to say about the current state of ministry? Considering the nature and descriptions of the present “full-time minister” position, it is very alarming how far we have gone from a biblical pattern even since the twentieth century. In the next article, we will see the work of first century preachers, the audiences they often preached to, the stance of Restoration leaders in the past, and some of the problems that have arisen due to the present views on ministry.

God Wants Us to Know Him

Ronald Bryant

One of the most outstanding facts about God is that He not only wants us to know Him. He wants us to want to know Him. Why? Why does God want us to know Him? Secondly, why does God want us to want to know Him? Why is it so vital that we have a heart ruled by knowledge of God? Why is it so important that we come to fully desire to know Him and that we also fully desire to understand His will for our lives?

A. W. Tozer argued in his work, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, “The most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.”

With this statement before us, it seems reasonable and appropriate that we reflect upon our thoughts and actions – our

tendencies as regards truths and people. Our common tendency is to cultivate mental images and then to hold to them, whether they match reality or not. Undeniably, we each move toward, cultivate, and hold to our own personal conception of God. Knowing this, God gave warning that we should take great care as to the thoughts we come to hold regarding Him (cf. Acts 17:22ff). As it was in the days of Paul, many give little thought to God and do not want to retain Him in their knowledge (Romans 1:28). Incredibly, most individuals think God is fully like them in character and purpose. Still others, no matter what else they hold to be true of God, view Him as being far removed and unconcerned with their actions. Yet, the message of the New Testament is specific regarding God’s knowledge, power, and

purpose. We are to use great care and be deeply concerned with holding to and being ruled by thoughts of God that correspond as nearly as possible to His true being.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF SUPERFICIAL KNOWLEDGE

They who have no desire to know God face little danger of grasping the truth about Him. Any knowledge they may come to possess about God they will finally treat with indifference. They that do not know the will of God cannot yield to it. They that do not desire to know and to do the will of God have no true desire for God (cf. John 7:17: Matthew 7:24ff.) Still, it is more than interesting to observe the religious exercises, and excesses, of those who do not know God. At best their

religious exercises are but “guessing games,” – so much fishing in the wishing-well of vague concepts with the frayed lines of good-intentions. They, like the Athenians, have no apparent reservations about building an altar to a being they do not know. Nor do they have any qualms about entering into the worship of a being they do not know at all. How can those possessing only vague concepts about God and His will expect to honor or obey Him? How can the vital, highly beneficial, and desirable fellowship to which God calls His people be embraced by people who are under the sway of inaccurate views and concepts about God and His will?

Unquestionably, a great deal of hard work is involved in the acquiring of knowledge. On the other hand, jumping to conclusions is a fairly easy process. Speculation is even easier. The human tendency is to follow the line of least resistance, yet such cannot lead one to God. Thought of God and thought of a need for a right understanding of His will is continually rejected in ways both subtle and glaring. In the present religious climate, many “religious practitioners” are doing a thriving business, in spite of the fact that they not only reject God’s will, but they also reject God. The messages and programs that distort the truth of God are many. Words and their meanings are distorted, and truth is set aside by bogus claims. Seldom is the hard work to gain essential knowledge engaged. In its place, subjective experience is embraced – to the denial and rejection of the will of God and the knowledge of God.

It may seem unnecessary to state, but words are important. What a word means is vital. How it is used is of great importance. That this is the case should be obvious. Consider the following words: Love and Unity. How are these words to be defined? Is a correct definition important? Surprisingly, some are alarmed with such an inquiry. With them the accuracy of the term is in “the eye of the beholder,” the definition is determined by the recipient of the word. (This point of view is part and parcel of the philosophy of “deconstructionism.” Deconstructionism as a philosophy has long been applied to constitutional matters, though not limited to the same. Now it is popular as an attitude toward the Bible.) Is the meaning of words

important? If words do not have specific and consistent meanings, what can be known, what can be understood, what can be advanced, what is to be rejected? Will vague definitions suffice? A larger question for the servant of God is does the definition honor God?

Words do have specific meanings. The authority determining the meaning of a word is the author, the one setting forth the words. This is the case with all communications. If the specific meaning intended by the author is not honored, the author is not honored. Yet for a long time, this kind of specificity has been rejected. It has been called “narrow mindedness” and it has been labeled “legalism.” Surprisingly, these words come up quite often. In view of some of the protestations mentioned above, one is made to wonder whether the terms “narrow mindedness” and “legalism” are specific terms with specific meanings, or are they but vague terms with vague meanings.

Superficiality is another interesting phenomenon, especially as it regards spiritual matters. Superficiality is in vogue. It is even preferred by many. Some simple but hard questions demand to be answered. To what does superficiality lead? Logically, superficial definitions can lead but to superficial understanding. Secondly, superficial knowledge can lead only to one kind of relationship – a superficial one.

Personal bias and personal desires lead people to see only what they want to see. Such is part and parcel of the following, widely accepted, statement: “Each person is entitled to his own point of view, and with each person, one’s personal point of view is correct for him.” It may be offensive, but this statement is the path and pattern of willful ignorance. That such a point of view is patently false can be established by asking the following: Does it follow that a wrong point of view is right and that an incorrect understanding is correct? If so, words have no meaning! The desire to settle for a vague knowledge on an important subject reveals much. It reveals a pattern of arrogance, indifference, and rebellion. When God is the subject, to be superficial as regards Him or His will is to manifest a lack of love and devotion to God. Such opposes even the possibility of

real knowledge of God. But why is real knowledge so vital? It is vital because right relationship with God is made to depend upon right thought about Him. While thinking may be difficult and study may be demanding, there is no other way to obtain knowledge of God. Yet, our human tendency is to follow the easy path. We try to avoid that which is too demanding. The necessity of standing for truth is daunting. Additionally, fear is a powerful force. Fear of confrontation, fear of controversy, and a preference for peace and safety, even at the expense of eternal verities, lead some to fold their hands and sit in silence. Some suggest that “time will take care of the problem.” But time not utilized can produce nothing.

Many people give little thought to God. God’s truth is not important to them. A surprising number of those who claim to believe in God see standing for the truth of God or holding to or defending it as “a bit much.” They choose the least line of resistance. Some have a large appetite for the latest religious comfort food. But they do not desire to know God! This is not a new thing.

In words that literally drip with sarcasm, Job spoke of the wicked and their prosperity. He spoke of their words against God. They said of God, “Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him?” (Job 21:14-15)

Hosea spoke of the people of his day and of their response to God. He said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hosea 4:6).

Jeremiah described the people of Israel and of their spiritual poverty. “Your dwelling place is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know Me,” says the Lord (Jeremiah 9:6).

God can be known! But we can refuse to know Him. We can refuse to seek God. But the question each of us must consider is this: Do I truly desire to know and honor God?

The Tablet of Cursing

Continued from page 1

I have been privileged to get to know Dr. Stripling in the last few years and heard him lecture at archaeology meetings. He is currently the excavator at Shiloh, where we were also able to visit in February.

The lead tablet containing the curse was discovered in December 2019 while wet-sifting discarded material from an earlier excavation of Mt. Ebal conducted by Adam Zertal from 1982 to 1986. Zertal believed he had found two altars at the site, one of which may have been the actual altar of Joshua.

The curse tablet is important in adding another piece of evidence that the Bible story is true. The scripture that concerns the tablet is found in “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse...thou shalt set the blessing upon Mount Gerizim, and the curse upon Mount Ebal” (Deuteronomy 11:26, 29). The tablet has been peer reviewed by Scott Stripling, Director of Archaeological Studies Institute at the Bible Seminar. Dating shows it is centuries older than any other Hebrew inscription. Before, the earliest inscription was in the tenth century BC. According to Associates of Biblical Research, the tablet is inscribed with 40 ancient Hebrew letters and is “centuries older than any known Hebrew inscription from ancient Israel.” Stripling teamed up with four scientists from the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and two epigraphers to decipher the text. They believe it says: “Cursed, cursed, cursed – cursed by the God YHW. You will die cursed. Cursed you will surely die. Cursed by YHW – cursed, cursed, cursed.”

Another scholar concludes: “It would be the first attested use of the name of God in the Land of Israel and would set the clock back on proven Israelite literacy by several centuries – showing that the Israelites were literate when they entered the Holy Land, and therefore could have written the Bible as some of the events it documents took place.”

John Stonestreet of Breakpoint tells the reason for the find’s importance. “The common perception among biblical scholars, however, has been that the bulk of the Bible wasn’t written when it says it was. It’s long been assumed that the early, and supposedly primitive, Israelites simply lacked the skill to come up with the written grandeur of books like Genesis and Deuteronomy. This tiny curse reveals that the right people at the right time in the right place were writing about God just as the Bible describes. Despite the confidence of the scholarly consensus, this provides proof of the Israelites’ literary ability, hundreds of years before skeptics thought it possible.”

Therefore, of importance to the Bible student is that the tablet and curse was written in the Hebrew language, which skeptics

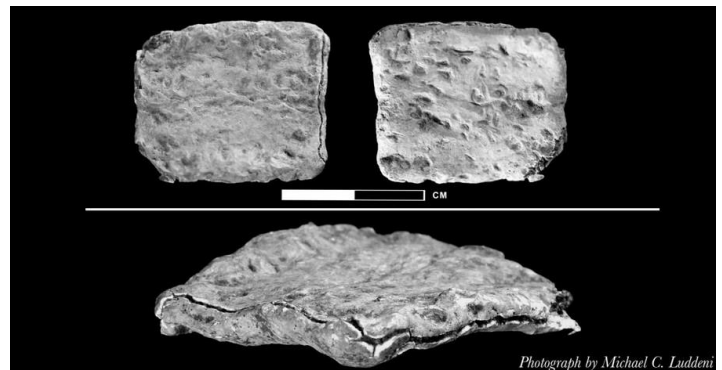
said had not developed during the time of the exodus and conquest. These skeptics claim the Bible was written very late in the Persian period, but this discovery shows that concept is false. The Bible was written by Moses and Joshua as it claims to be.

The artifact is 200 years older than any other Hebrew text in existence and 1350 years older than the Dead Sea Scrolls. Believers believe the Bible is written as a first-hand account. This tablet is proof that it was. Archaeology is confirming the truth of the Bible again.

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Photograph by Michael C. Ludden



“WHEN I SEE THE BLOOD, I WILL PASS OVER YOU”

Raymond Elliott

Before God brought the tenth plague upon Egypt, that is, the death of the firstborn in every family among the Egyptians including the animals, He informed Moses that no harm would come to the children of Israel (Exodus, chapters 11 and 12). On the tenth day of the first month of Abib, every man was to take a male lamb of the sheep or goats and keep it until the fourteenth day when it was to be slain. The men were instructed to take the blood of the animal and put some on the doorposts and the lintel of the house. Instructions were also given as to how they were to prepare the lamb for a meal in each household. Only unleavened bread was to be eaten with the meal. This was the “Lord’s Passover.”

The Passover was to be a memorial for Israel throughout their generations. The Lord spoke to Moses, “For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:12, 13).

The lamb that was killed was without blemish. The blood that was placed on the doorposts and lintel of the houses assured the people of Israel that the firstborn of each family would be spared from death.

The Passover lamb of the Old Testament was a foreshadowing of Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf. In 1 Corinthians we read, “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) The lamb that was offered by the children of Israel was to be without blemish, so was the Lamb of God who was sacrificed on Calvary.

The apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:18, 19, “knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious



blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” Just as the lamb’s blood was placed on the doorposts and lintel, the blood of the Lamb of God was shed when He was on Calvary’s cross.

When Jesus was eating with His disciple during Passover, He took a cup and said, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). John wrote in Revelation 1:6, “To Him who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood, who has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father – to Him be the glory and power forever and ever! Amen.” The apostle Paul

wrote in Ephesians 1:7 concerning Jesus Christ, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.” And we know that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22).

Thank God for His infinite grace and the precious blood of Jesus Christ. In Romans 6:3, 4 we learn when we come in contact with the blood of Christ: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

It is not the water that saves us when we are immersed, rather it is the blood of Christ when we are “baptized into His death” when His precious blood was shed. It is in this sense that God “passes over us” in the forgiveness of our sins. There was an old hymn that we used to sing in worship when I was a boy entitled, “When I See The Blood” that contains this thought. Here are two of the stanzas and the chorus,

“Christ, our Redeemer, died on the cross,
Died for the sinner, paid all his due;
All who receive Him need never fear,
Yes, He will pass, will pass over you.
O what compassion, O boundless love,
Jesus hath power, Jesus is true;
All who believe are safe from the storm,
O, He will pass, will pass over you.
When I see the blood, When I see the
blood, When I see the blood, I will pass
over you.”

The Preacher and His Text

Mike Kiser

“The word *text* is from the Latin *textus* or *textum* and signifies something woven or spun. It is, therefore, that out of which the sermon is woven, the basis of the sermon or discourse” (William Evans, *How to Prepare Sermons*, p. 25).

One of the first questions to be dealt with must be: “Does a sermon have to have a text?” Phillips Brooks in his monumental work *Lectures on Preaching* made this observation:

For over six hundred years now it has been the almost invariable custom of Christian preachers to take a text from Scripture and associate their thoughts more or less strictly with that. For the first twelve Christian centuries there seems to have been no such prevailing habit.

Some today would say yes, a sermon should have a text, and some would say no! My personal preference has always been to preach from a text.

A good thing to keep in mind is that a text out of context is nothing more than a pretext. This can happen when the preacher takes a passage of scripture as the text for his sermon and then makes no further use of it or allusion to it. Probably most young preachers starting out have been guilty of failing to handle aright the word of truth on this matter.

Sometimes the temptation to be sensational causes the immature to select outlandish titles for their sermons such as: “Seven Ducks in a Muddy Stream,” “Seven NOTS in the Devil Tale,” “Giving the Pigs a Permanent Wave,” and such like. Then off the preacher goes to twist a text around to fit his topic. The congregation gets carried away but not necessarily to get their feet planted on higher ground. If an older preacher happens to be in attendance, he reflects upon an occasion or two in which he carried on like that in his pulpit, and with a silent whisper to himself says, “He will quit doing that after a while.”

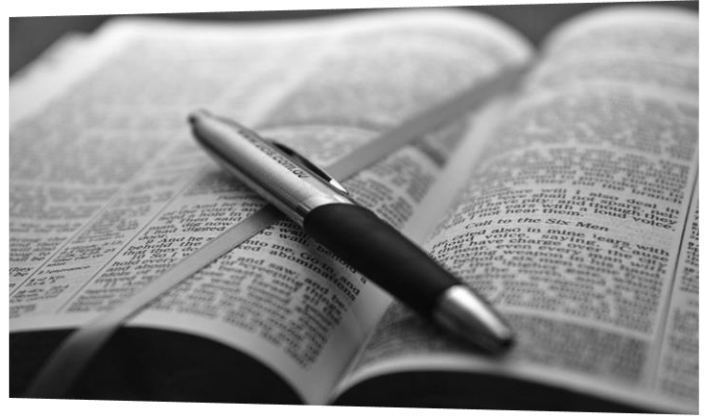
It is a good thing to preach “from” a text and not come along after the sermon has been constructed and search through the concordance for a verse to hang over the front door. To use the words of William Evans again, “The text is not to be a mere motto for a sermon, nor is it to be chosen after the theme or subject is chosen, and the sermon finished” (p. 25).

G. Campbell Morgan gave three solid reasons for preaching from a text: (1) the authority that is in the text as being a part of the word of God, (2) the definiteness which it must give, when properly dealt with, to the Christian message, and (3) the maintenance of variety (*Preaching*, p. 60).

A well-chosen text can arouse the interest of the congregation. It also can gain the confidence of the congregation that the preacher is going to proclaim the Word of God, that indeed they are about to hear a “thus saith the Lord.” James David Burrell wrote:

As the shadows of the Dark Ages gathered and deepened, the Bible became a neglected book, almost as wholly forgotten as in the period preceding the reign of Josiah. Preachers began to take their text from the fathers, from Aristotle or other philosophers, from almost anywhere. As a result, the message of the pulpit became distinctively ethical, not infrequently secular, and the Biblical factor was largely eliminated from the current consideration of the problems of life (*The Sermon*, p. 29).

Some congregations may be headed for the Dark Ages again as their esteemed pulpit committee praises them over their selection of “Dr. Boorus Moore” to occupy center stage to entertain the faint-hearted with his worthless opinions. An “I say so” from the pulpit is a sure way to send the sheep into a wilderness wandering and the



young folks to their ever-ready texting machines! A text will always help the congregation to stay with the preacher’s train of thought, and at the same time, it will keep the preacher on track as well. The text is a sure nail on which he is to hang his arguments.

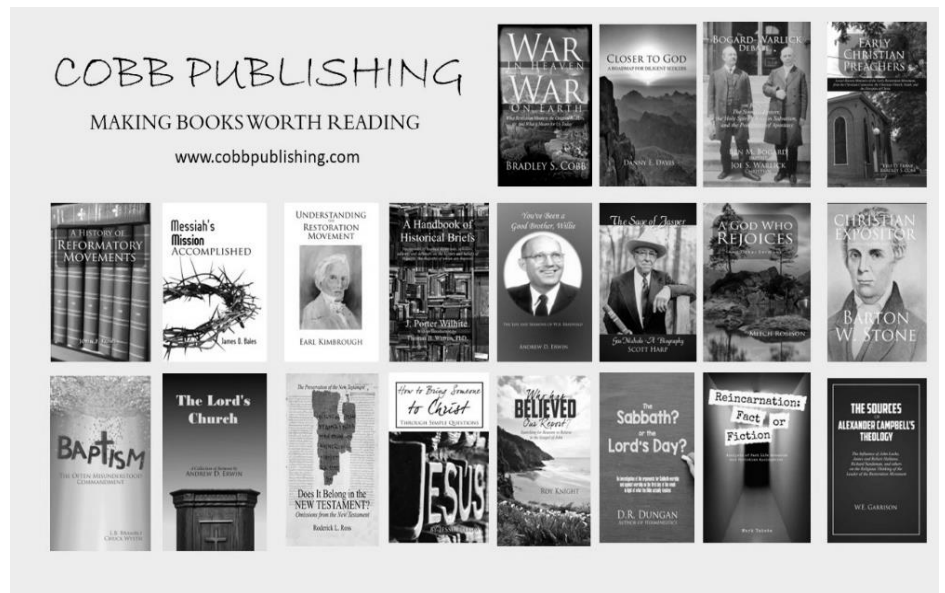
Jacob Fry, in his short but worthwhile work, *Elements of Homiletics* (1897), gave some good advice on the subject of “Choosing a text.” He had a list of eleven “dos and don’ts.” These three I will share with you: (1) “Texts should neither be too long or too short.” His words of caution suggested that an “extended passage” could confuse the mind by the variety of subjects included and because the text is not easily remembered. But the opposite problem would be selecting one or two unimportant words from a verse and building the sermon around them. (2) “Passages should not be chosen for text simply because they are unusual and striking.” The problem being they may not teach what the sermon is meant to set forth. (3) The following worthwhile observation was on the question of whether it is proper to use “texts by way of accommodation., i.e. selecting a text for the purpose of illustrating some truth to which the text has no reference or connection.” Fry gave this observation: “The chief objection urged against it is that it is an unauthorized use of the sacred narrative and puts a meaning into it which was never intended” (p. 15-24).

How do we choose a text?

Texts are sometimes chosen out of our regular reading, sometimes in order to deal with some special need, sometimes in order to define doctrinal teachings, and sometimes because of their revelation of great things...in that regular reading of the Bible devotionally, there will constantly be discovered

some one text, some one statement, some one verse, which grips. When such is the case let us never hurry on. It is good to stop and put it down. Postpone further reading, until we have at least said to ourself, Why did that arrest me; what is there in that which pulled me up? Make note of it (Morgan, p. 64, 65).

The Bible is a big book! A Bible-reading preacher will never run out of ammunition.



Redeeming the Time

Robert Pruet

In Ephesians 5:15-16, Paul tells the brethren in Ephesus: “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” What we do with our time is so important because we only have a limited amount of it. James said, “For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14).

Jesus tells us how we are to spend our time: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). Notice that word *first*. Not second or third, but to seek the kingdom first. Jesus, when asked what the greatest commandment was, responded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

What are you spending your time on? Does the way you spend your time show the Lord that you love Him? Are you seeking the kingdom first? How much time do you spend each day thinking about God? How much time do you spend praying or reading God’s word? We can all quote our favorite TV shows and movies, but how many Bible verses can we quote? How much of our time is committed to bringing souls to Christ? When was the last time we invited someone to worship services?

Jesus came to this earth to seek and save the lost. And we as His body, the church, have that same mission. It isn’t just the mission of the preacher or the elders, but each member of the body. Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and

of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Paul declared, “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11). And that is true. As Christians, our salvation is getting closer each day. But what about for those that are lost? For them, with each day condemnation draws nearer. What could be a more important use of our time than bringing a soul to the Lord? It is time for us to do as Paul says and awake out of our sleep.

We cannot save the lost if we are not actively seeking them. Let us all use the brief time we have upon this earth wisely and show the Lord that we love Him with all of our heart, soul, and mind. And let us always be seeking the kingdom first.



More than a Name

Andy Erwin

The city of Sardis was founded in 1200 BC and became the capital of the ancient Lydian empire (680-547 BC). By the writing of Revelation, Sardis was known to have had an influential community of Jewish residents. The synagogue of this city was not found on the edge of the city as was typical in that area, but in the heart of the community. It is believed to have had the capacity to seat 1,000 people and is by far the largest ancient synagogue yet to be discovered. The ancient city of Sardis came to an end with the attack of the Persian army led by Chosroes II in 616 AD.

In Revelation, Christ is identified as the One who has the seven stars (“angels,” 1:20) and seven Spirits (“eyes,” 5:6). He begins His address to each church by making clear, “I know your works.” The works of the churches were of utmost importance to Christ. In each address to the churches of Asia, the works and faithfulness of the congregations are the only matters to be discussed. Christ did not mention the attendance or size of the congregation. He did not mention the size of the contribution or the building. Many of the things which concern churches today were of no concern to Christ. He made no mention of budgets, building expansions or renovations. He only spoke of their works and their faithfulness.

A congregation can have a team of ministers, elders and deacons in abundance, an ornate building with a million-dollar budget, but if they are lacking in works and faithfulness, they must repent. By His address to the church at Sardis, we learn that Jesus pays no attention to the worldly standards of excellence which shallow minds perceive to be earmarks of greatness. He is only concerned with the works and the faithfulness of His church. If a congregation is to be faithful and remain faithful to the Lord, they must also find their works and faithfulness to be of utmost and unrivaled importance. Nothing else can compare.

The Lord rebuked Sardis because “you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.” The church was alive in name only. Although they continued to assemble as a congregation, their works were not perfect before God. As Christians who are eager to please the Lord, we must pay close attention to Christ’s remedy for this dying church. Observe:

- (1) “Be watchful” – be mindful and recognize what has happened; be careless no longer.
- (2) “Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die” – stop the digression; don’t allow any more works to die but strengthen one another and the works you are doing.
- (3) “Remember how you have received and heard” – go back into your history and remember how you once were faithful in

welcoming and heeding the word of God. When a church no longer listens to the truth, its demise is eminent.

(4) “Hold fast” – be faithful and hold tightly to the Lord and His word. Hold tightly to the Lord and the Bible. Never let go!

(5) “Repent” – turn from the digression and return to Christ. Every wayward Christian and dying congregation must do so to make things right with God. God will not compromise on this issue. “Be holy, for I am Holy.” “Repent or perish.” The road that leads a church or Christian away from the Lord is the very road that must be reversed to come home. Repentance is turning around and going back the way you came. Only when we reverse the trends or actions which led us away from God, can it truly be said that we have repented.

The Lord’s church must be more than a name on a building; and the people who meet to worship in that building should care more about their works and faithfulness before God than having a name that lives – that is, being a “big church” in the brotherhood.


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