

# Seek Ye First...

"...the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

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## FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

Jeff Sweeten

The exact time of the incident is not known (John 3:1ff); even the location is fuzzy. What we do know is that an influential Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus by night asking questions; he was perplexed by this charismatic Rabbi whose message had captivated the masses (Matthew 7:28). It wasn't His dynamic, stage-pacing presentations (Matthew 5:1-2), nor was it His debonair, suave demeanor (Isaiah 53:2). Yet, who could deny His works?

In the context, Jesus gently explained the figure (vs. 3-8) and fact (vs. 13-15) of His crucifixion to this foiled Pharisee. Never before had such a magnanimous expression of divine love been poured out from heaven; and never would it be given again (Hebrews 7:27). Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice, a sacred offering for the sins of humanity, and Nicodemus was struggling to grasp such ethereal notions. It is little wonder that the struggle continues today, even over the very text in which this great revelation occurs.

John 3:16 is one of the most abused passages of scripture in the Bible. It is lifted from its context, wrested, and mutated into the damnable heresy of a manufactured doctrine foreign to the faith. Many are guilty of reading into this verse the false assumption that belief in Christ is the sum-total requirement for salvation. Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He did not say one is saved by faith alone.

Its popularity in reference to religious expression is unequalled. It is often the first verse quoted in recognition of God's love, it is the fiat formula for faith-only salvation, and its magnificence even manifests itself on white-capped placards in the waving sea of a stadium's sports fans. That the pious public is aware of its existence is unquestionable, but understanding it is another matter. What did Jesus say? Can we honestly believe in belief alone? These questions broach a popular misconception promoted by many sincere preachers today and believed by many misguided parishioners. Some claim "...that we are justified by faith, only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort" (The Book of Discipline, p. 57). Others say, "that justification ... (is) solely through faith in the Redeemer's blood; by virtue of which faith his perfect righteousness is freely imputed to us of

God; that it brings us into a state of most blessed peace and favor with God" (Church Manuel, p. 48). Both creeds give John 3:16 as the primary proof text for their assertion. Yet, their inconsistency is indefensible. If Jesus was teaching faith alone, what of repentance? Is a person acceptable that continues in the sins they have supposedly been released from? How could one argue against Jesus' own teaching on the necessary nature of repentance (Luke 13:3)? If repentance is necessary in salvation, then one cannot be saved by faith alone.

Nicodemus was not struggling with the yet-to-come Augustinian/Calvinistic perversions of a simple faith. He was trying to grasp the nature of the Messiah. Jesus' dialogue was intended to reveal His purpose for coming into the world; it was one of salvation. He was the promised One, who received the prophets' praise (Isaiah 52:1ff). He was the King whose kingdom would be forever (Daniel 2:44). And, as "Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (3:14-15). The parallels are uncanny. Moses, great leader of God's chosen people, was the shadow of the Christ. Those whose faith in the serpentine icon compelled them to look upon it were healed of their plague of poison. Those whose faith in the Cross compels them to look to the Christ for salvation will be healed of the venom of sin. An Old Testament scholar like Nicodemus could understand these analogies and recognize the salvation Jesus offered.

Likewise, the troubled Pharisee could easily see the dichotomy in divine allegiance, and such must have been his struggle. A saving faith that demands obedience (Romans 6:17) would separate sheep from goats; and there is no middle ground (Luke 11:23). The condemnation of the world lies in the willfully blind. "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (3:19). We commend to you this issue of *Seek Ye First* because we have that same choice, and Jesus' teachings are clear, "for God so loved the world."

807 East 21<sup>st</sup> St.  
Odessa, TX

# Seek Ye First...

## Publication Offices

### **EDITORIAL STAFF:**

**Michael Light**, Business

Bangs Church of Christ  
P. O. Box 41  
Bangs, TX 76823  
(915) 752-6464  
E-mail: [mcflight@bwoodtx.com](mailto:mcflight@bwoodtx.com)

**Tom Moore**, Marketing

North Main Church of Christ  
823 North Main Street  
Malvern, AR 72104  
(501) 332-2273  
E-mail: [preacher@hsnp.com](mailto:preacher@hsnp.com)

**Jeff Sweeten**, Correspondence

Eisenhower Church of Christ  
807 East 21<sup>st</sup> Street  
Odessa, TX 79761  
(915) 337-5315  
E-mail: [question@eisenhowerchurch.org](mailto:question@eisenhowerchurch.org)

Web Page:

<http://www.seekyefirst.us/>

## Our Purpose

The editors of *Seek Ye First* produce this biblical journal to provide scriptural material dealing with the issues that are currently affecting our families, our nation and the world. Our intent is to challenge souls to return to the "old paths" (Jeremiah 6:16) for their sole source of authority in religious matters. Our policy is to speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11), encouraging people to study to show themselves approved unto God, enabling them to rightly divide the word (2 Timothy 2:15). We make every effort to deal boldly with the issues that confront Christianity, with no apology, and strive to do so "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

# DID JESUS LIE IN MATTHEW 24?

The obvious answer to the above question is a resounding "NO." The mere suggestion that Jesus the Christ was ever in error should be more than enough to make the blood of any faithful child of God boil. However, if the doctrine of Premillennialism is correct then Christ was wrong.

The basic doctrine is that Jesus came to the earth to establish an earthly kingdom. But, unfortunately the Jews of His day were not receptive and killed Him. This action on the part of rebellious men forced God to go to "Plan B." This second plan in short was, according to the doctrine, the formation of the church. The position next postulates that Jesus will return at the end of time and physically destroy His enemies in the Battle of Armageddon. Some versions affirm a time of rapture (the faithful of God being whisked away to a place of protection and rest) while the wicked are left to face a time (usually thought to be seven years) of tribulation. The doctrine goes on to assert that Jesus (and other writers, such as Daniel and John in the book of Revelation) gave us signs to help us determine when the end of time will be.

It is my intent in this short article to show some of the inconsistencies with the doctrine as well as various aspects that are blatantly false. I unequivocally contend those who accept the Premillennial concept are totally opposed to the Christ of the Bible and Christianity as set forth in it.

In Matthew 24:3, Jesus was asked two questions by His disciples. Notice, "And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Again there are two questions, the first one contextually is asking, "When shall the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple be?" Jesus had shown them the temple and the city and said, "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (vs. 2). The second question is the last phrase, "and the end of the world?"

The apostles are asking for signs of the destruction of Jerusalem, they are also asking for signs of the end of the world. If we simply accept what Jesus says in this chapter, there is no difficulty. Notice that Jesus did list several signs that would precede the destruction of the city of David. He also warns His followers to pay attention and to flee the city when you see the signs coming to pass. Notice some of the signs of the coming destruction of Jerusalem. In verses 9-11, Jesus mentioned the persecution that would rise against Christians before the coming destruction. In verse 14, another time element is given: the gospel was to be preached to all the world prior to the destruction. In Colossians 1:23 the apostle Paul writes, "...be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister." The book of Colossians was written around 64 A. D. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A. D. by the Romans led by Titus. From verse 15-33, more details of the end of Jerusalem are given.

Matthew 24:34 is a key verse, notice, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." In this passage Jesus affirms

that everything He had said to this point would come to pass within the lifetime of the generation to which He spoke. He was giving this teaching about 33 A. D. less than forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem.

Beginning in verse 36 and continuing through the entire twenty-fifth chapter Jesus addresses the second question. Concerning signs indicating the end of time He states, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man..." (vs. 36). It is impossible to know when the end will be. He then spends several verses using examples to drive this point home. He begins with Noah, "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (37-39). Notice again in verse 42, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." Again He affirms we do not know when the end will be.

In this passage Jesus clearly falsifies the idea of Premillennialism. Those who hold to this position make Him a liar. Either the things He talked about did come to pass in the lifetime of His audience or they did not. If they didn't then Christ either lied, or was unable to see that His plan would be thwarted. In either case, He would have been a miserable failure. I affirm that Jesus Christ never failed in any area of His mission while here on the earth.

Some seem to forget that Jesus came to this earth primarily to take away the sins of mankind. "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). God's eternal plan (not "Plan B") was to save men through the instrumentality of the church. The Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul states, "...To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him" (Ephesians 3:8-12). God's wisdom and eternal purpose was to save the world through the church. To reduce the church to some type of "oops we failed, so we'll try this" action on the part of Deity is blasphemous.

The kingdom of Christ is a spiritual one. It is totally out of harmony with the New Testament to affirm that Jesus is going to physically destroy (kill) those who oppose Him in a war in the Middle East. Notice what He said in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."

The irony of all of this is simply the repetition of it. The Jews of Christ's day desired an earthly ruler who would destroy (physically) the Romans (their enemies). When Christ didn't come in that fashion, they rejected Him and finally killed Him. In our day many are still looking for a physical warrior. They seem almost giddy with anticipation every time there is a problem in the Middle East. We are not in the killing business; we are in the preaching of the gospel business. We are to take the life-giving message of Christ to a world lost in sin. Matthew 24 does not affirm Premillennialism, it actually teaches us to be prepared for the coming of Christ, whenever it is.

P. O. Box 41  
Bangs, TX

Theme This Issue:

## The Misunderstood Teachings of Jesus

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# THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

Tom Moore

In chapters 13-17 of the gospel account of John, inspiration records Jesus' last gathering with His disciples before His death. During these last few hours our Lord prepares His disciples for their appointed agony, and answers many of their questions. The Lamb of God informed them of their future work and promised them a Comforter. The Christ wanted His disciples to understand that He was about to be crucified and that He would live even after dying. Jesus made it known that they would suffer persecution. Jesus said all these things to prepare them – to keep them from falling away.

Before Jesus and His disciples started their ascent from the upper room to the Mount of Olives, Jesus proclaimed the parable of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-8). With these words Jesus uses an analogy to help them, and souls of all time, understand what our relationship to Him ought to be.

**"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman"** (John 15:1). Jesus is saying He is the real and genuine vine. This is important because all of the nutrients come through the vine to the branches. In the Old Testament Israel was pictured as the vine or vineyard of God (Isaiah 5:1-7). But the nation of Israel was a degenerate vine and her prophets told her so. Opposed to this, Jesus is telling His audience that He is the true vine. God the Father is the **"husbandman"** - not merely a hired dresser, but the owner. As such He gives close attention to the vine.

**"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit"** (John 15:2). The branch that does not bear fruit is taken away – it is severed from the vine. Since the branches represent individual Christians (John 15:5), we are instructed that to be pleasing to God we must bear fruit – or be severed from God. The branch that does not bear fruit is **"purged,"** or **pruned**. Fruit bearing branches are cleansed by teaching, training, and discipline – and they grow to produce even more fruit. The more fruit we bear the more we are pruned by the word of God to produce more fruit.

**"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you"** (John 15:3). Here for a moment, Jesus drops the analogy and refers to the spiritual state of His disciples in the upper room. They were **"clean"** from their past sins, yet needed continuous cleansing to remain justified. To apply this to the analogy, the disciples needed regular pruning to maintain their highest efficiency. The cleansing was done by means of the word. It is through obedience to God's word they were able to obtain forgiveness. **"Seeing ye have**

purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:22-23).

**"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing"** (John 15:4-5). Jesus here sets forth the condition for cleansing and fruit bearing – **"abide in me."** **"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"** (Galatians 3:27). As the life of the branch depends on its connection to the vine, so our spiritual life is wholly dependant on our connection with the True Vine. Abiding in Christ and Christ abiding in us can only occur as we live wholly by the word of God – obedience is the key!

**"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned"** (John 15:6). This is the result of **not abiding in Christ!** Notice, Jesus said, **"If a man abide not in me"** – A MAN – not a church. This has reference to individual Christians – not to denominations. If we are not abiding in Christ we will be cast forth. Those that are severed from Christ are ultimately cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

**"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you"** (John 15:7). To **"abide"** in Christ is not only to be in His church, but is to live in close communion and fellowship with Jesus. The promise for those in Christ: **"ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you."** But we must ask according to His will (1 John 5:14-15). Those in the vine do not ask for forbidden things, and realize that God will answer our request in a way that is best for us.

**"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples"** (John 15:8). Fruit bearing is a proof of discipleship (Matthew 7:15-20). As faithful disciples, we bring glory to God. **"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven"** (Matthew 5:16).

Are you in the True Vine? Are you bringing glory to God by your obedience to the True Vine?

2406 S. Main St.  
Malvern, AR

Guest Article...

## KINGDOM ON THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

Geoff Litke

Bookshelves across the world groan under the weight of the “Left Behind” series, authored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, and have sparked phenomenal interest in end-times, the church, the kingdom, the antichrist, and the “millennium.” The authors place heavy emphasis on prophecy as it relates to these topics and current events. Though the series is accurately classified “religious fiction,” it is shameful that many confidently base their religious views on this contrived saga. While the series is extensive, one does not have to pour over volumes to understand the current craze. LaHaye has conveniently condensed his beliefs into a book called “Charting the End Times,” which is only a repackaging of Clarence Larkin’s “Dispensational Truth,” to which LaHaye dedicated his book. However, the Bible is the correct foundation and source for religious truth (2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:16).

The New Testament is a message of hope, but in it LaHaye and Larkin find tragedy, teaching that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, FAILED in His mission to establish His kingdom. After noting several instances of men rejecting God, Larkin says, “God again made the attempt to set up His kingdom on earth, and the angel Gabriel announced to Mary the birth of the King” (p.85) ... “But the king was rejected and crucified and setting up the kingdom was postponed, and the kingdom took on its ‘Mystery Form’ under the name of the ‘kingdom of heaven’” (p.84). This distinction is NOT found in the scriptures. LaHaye leads his readers to believe that the kingdom was rejected and God’s plans foiled. In all this, he still seeks solace saying, “In a world filled with chaos, despair, corruption, violence and rampant evil, the certainty of the Millennium offers us assurance that God’s prophetic program has not been abandoned...Because of this Christians today need not have anxiety or fear. Our ‘blessed hope’ is Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13), and we can have confidence that His kingdom will indeed come” (p. 72). This is hardly comforting. After showing all the times man has allegedly stumped God, why will it not happen again?

Do not despair; refer to Christ’s assessment of the kingdom rather than men’s. Jesus used such a contrast in teaching on this profound subject in Matthew 16:13-18. He asked His disciples what men were saying about Him and they recited the errors of the day. Then, Christ asked who *they* say He is. Peter declared, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus confirmed Peter’s answer, and said it was upon that rock (the fact that He is the Christ) that He would build His church.

Christ and Messiah both mean anointed. Christ was chosen by God to establish His church, which is the Kingdom. Jesus is the rock, the church’s one foundation (I Corinthians 3:11), a stone cut out of a mountain without hands, Who set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44-45). Jesus understood these prophecies pertained to Him (Luke 24:25ff; Acts 1:3). It was from such conviction that He would say, “I WILL build my church” (Matthew 16:18), and man could never thwart His effort! Christ did not say “I may build my church if those bullies let me.” Man did reject Him (Acts 4:11-12), but God’s power is unstoppable (I Peter 2:6). Jesus fully intended to establish the kingdom in death from His first teachings (Matthew 4:17). Paul concurs by revelation when speaking of the church existing “according to his eternal purpose” (Ephesians 3:3-4, 11).

Christ showed His determination to successfully build His kingdom, stating, “the gates of hades shall not prevail against it.” Jesus of Nazareth had all the power of heaven at His disposal. He could have called twelve legions of angels to stop the events leading to His sacrifice upon Calvary (Matthew 26:53), but a sacrificial death was His way to purchase the precious church (Acts 20:28). Christ, in death, did go to the grave (Luke 16) but thankfully this power of death (Hades) could not prevail.

In Acts 2, Peter explained that Jesus of Nazareth was selected by God as testified by His works (v. 22), and showed that Jesus was delivered from death. Friends, there is no joy or consolation in thinking that the church, established by and for Christ according to the eternal purpose of God, is nothing more than a “Plan B” due to a divine oversight. God knew the Jews would reject His Son, but God raised Him because “it was not possible that he should be holden” of death (v. 24). This was not spoken of David, whose bones were among them, but of Christ who ascended into heaven to take His place upon the throne of David (vs. 25-30). Peter, in this way, wielded the keys to the kingdom explaining to the hearers the terms of entrance according to Lord Jesus Christ (vs. 36-38). Those who obeyed the terms of entrance, demanded by He who sits upon the throne of David in heaven, were added to the church of Christ (v. 47). After all, Christ said, “I will build MY church” (Matthew 16:18).

2535 N. W. Loop  
Stephenville, TX

# THE NEW BIRTH

Tom Moore

Our world is filled with erroneous views concerning the new birth, or what it means to be born again as mentioned in John 3:1-5. The proper understanding of these verses begins in John 2:23-24, "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men." They were a people who "believed on" Jesus, but who were rejected by the Lord because they had "faith only."

The failure of those "believers in his name" to be accepted by Jesus was due to the fact that no one was ever accepted upon the basis of faith alone - obedience has always been required. One of the things that one must have in addition to faith is to experience the new birth, and this is the subject of John 3:1-5.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a leader in the Sanhedrin, "came to Jesus by night" (John 3:1-2). Perhaps, he chose the night for he feared his associates on the Sanhedrin, or it may be that he wanted to enjoy an uninterrupted conversation with Jesus. Nicodemus knew that Jesus was "a teacher come from God," because of all the miracles that he had seen or heard that Jesus had performed. Nicodemus believed that Jesus was "a teacher come from God," - he had faith, but there would be more required of him.

In response to Nicodemus' admittance of faith, Jesus says, "You must be born again" (John 3:5). Jesus wanted Nicodemus to realize that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." This emphasizes the absolute necessity of the new birth. It is not merely true that one cannot enter God's kingdom without the new birth - but he cannot even see it! The requirement here stated by Jesus was actually a demand that Nicodemus forsake all this world has to offer and enter a totally new way of life.

This was a shocking requirement for Nicodemus, and at this point in time, he was not able to accept it, for he said, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (John 3:4).

Jesus then says, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). One cannot partake of the new birth, and thus enter the kingdom, unless water and Spirit are involved. What, then, is meant by being born of the "water and of the Spirit"?

Paul taught that the Almighty "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom

of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). This teaches us that one must be in the kingdom (the church) to be saved.

Scripture teaches us that one must believe, repent, confess the name of Christ, and be baptized to obtain salvation (John 3:16; Luke 13:3; Romans 10:10; Mark 16:16). Jesus tells us that to enter the kingdom one must be "born of the water and of the Spirit." Since things equal to the same things are equal to each other, it follows that to be "born of the water and of the Spirit" is to believe in Christ, repent of one's sins, confess one's faith in Christ, and to be baptized in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

John 3:5 teaches figuratively what Acts 2:38 literally says: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.." To be "born again" simply means to obey the gospel plan of salvation.

Many today that deny baptism its proper role in the new birth state that "water" in John 3:5 means something other than baptism. But it is important to note that the only water in the religion of Jesus is water baptism. To deny that John 3:5 speaks of baptism is to be dishonest and to be willingly blind to the truth.

To be born "of the Spirit" occurs by obeying the words of the Holy Spirit, and today these words are revealed only in the Bible. This is clearly seen in 1 Peter 1:22-23, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."

We hear much today of "born again Christians" - this would be like saying I am a "Christian Christian," or I am "born again born again." The truth is, if you are a Christian it is because you have been born again - that is, you have believed the Gospel by being baptized, immersed in water for the remission of sins.

When those on the day of Pentecost took part in the new birth (baptized for the remission of sins) they were added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47) - His kingdom. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Friends, have you taken part in the new birth?

2406 S. Main St.  
Malvern, AR

# A HARD SAYING

Jeff Sweeten

“Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” (John 6:60). Hard sayings were not the standard in Jesus’ teaching. He wasn’t a mystic full of paradox, preaching profound and elusive enigmas. However, Jesus could dig deeply from the wells of wisdom, with a full command of every grammatical tool in the linguist’s box. During a lesson in a Capernaum synagogue, His claim to be the bread of life met with resistance and misunderstanding. He used figurative speech to explain our total dependence upon Him, saying, “For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him” (vs. 55-56). But, for many a disciple, it was too much! And, unfortunately, “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (v. 66).

The exodus continues today. While some wholly accept the error of a literal consumption of the body and a literal drinking of His blood (the cannibalism of “transubstantiation”), others only nibble on the Bread of Life, mixing Him with the pleasant tasting jellies of liberalism, ecumenicalism, and denominational doctrine. Claiming to be a “Christian” is compromised when one uses unscriptural, unauthorized religious names, creeds, and practices that dilute or adulterate the pure word of God (Proverbs 30:5). All too often, it is a gross misunderstanding of what Jesus actually taught, and the resultant innovations interjected as substitute doctrines, that He Himself condemns. “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9).

How can we understand Jesus in His teaching and come to that unity of mind Paul demanded? “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10)? We must first understand that God is reasonable and logical, and that He expects us to be the same: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 1:18a). When we become so “logophobic” that we fear common sense in regard to religious matters, we open ourselves up to the errors of confusion and contradiction. Further, our common sense way of ascertaining truth in everyday life can be used to understand God’s will. The Bible was not penned by scholars for scholars. God’s eternal deity demands His innate ability to communicate completely with His creation, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as

they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:20). You need professional help to misunderstand most of Jesus’ plain teachings. Another consideration has to do with the context (both immediate and remote) in which a statement is made. Taking meaning from a single verse divorced from the surrounding thoughts might make for nifty devotional material or “sermonettes” for “Christianettes,” but it often draws lessons not actually taught in the text. The right revelation is essential in defending divine doctrine.

Jesus used the same principles of right thinking to convey the Father’s will as humanity has used since creation. In all relationships, from relatives to religion, we can only safely draw conclusions about persons, things, or ideas based upon sufficient evidence. To reach beyond the evidence to savor supposition will feed faulty conclusions every time. Notice also that in our every spoken word and action, we proceed by authority, human or divine. If we are truly Christians, we walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7), and obtain our faith from God’s word (Romans 10:17). To act or speak without divine authority is sin (Romans 14:23; Colossians 3:17). So, in determining what is authorized, a child of God will act on revelation. The question is not “Where does the Bible say it is wrong?” The question is, “Where does the Bible say it is right.” And, finally, God speaks to us today through His word. He conveys His desires through direct statements or with approved examples. The foundational element in understanding God’s word must be divine implication, since I must infer what God implies. God nowhere literally tells Jeff Sweeten to be baptized; I correctly infer that from the fact that “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). I therefore reason, “If I want to be saved and not damned, I must believe and be baptized.” For the honest heart, it is not really that hard.

Most of the “hard” sayings of which Jesus is accused are perceived as such more because of rebellion and ignorance than understandability. If God said it, that settles it, and I had better believe it (Hebrews 11:6). If I truly believe it, I will render more than lip service, I will obey (Matthew 15:8). And, as disciples of Christ, our expression of obedience in worship and service will reflect Paul’s observation: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

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