

Straight Bible Talk

Manchester Church of Christ, Share Christ's Love and Share His Message

Just the Bible

The Bible may have more to fear from its friends than from its enemies. Enemies of the Bible are obvious. They bloviate, pontificate, exaggerate, lie and distort in every kind of way. "Friends" of the Bible are more discreet in their attacks.

For example, when confronted with a verse in the Bible that they do not like, "friends" of the Bible are likely to reply, "But it says over here . . ." So, what the Bible says in one place cannot be true because it says something contradictory someplace else?!!

The enemies of the Bible make it plain that they are enemies. "The Bible is full of contradictions," is one of their favorite expressions. Yet, the friends of the Bible in practice agree with the enemies when they refuse to consider what the Bible says in one place because they prefer what it says in another.

When Paul (whom we believe wrote Hebrews) said, "For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable . . .," he had in mind the covenant given by God at Mount Sinai. He goes on to emphasize how much greater respect is deserved by the words that have come to us through Jesus, confirmed by God through signs, wonders and various miracles.

The commands and principles that God has given us to live by are "unalterable." That is the same truth expressed by Moses in Deuteronomy when he quotes God as saying, "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you."

That is the same truth expressed by John near the close of the book of Revelation:

"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book."

The unalterable character of the Word of God is made plain by many other statements as well. For example, Jude wrote, "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." Paul wrote, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!" Jesus warned, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." Another warning from Paul was expressed in these words, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron."

Someone has said, "The Bible says it; I believe it; that settles it." It might be better to recognize that the Bible settles it whether you believe it or not.

Yet it is so easy to confuse our opinions with what the Bible really says. We can draw out conclusions, relying on our own logic and end up saying things that never entered the mind of God.

Or, again, people argue that some things that the Bible says are "not important," with the conclusion being that there are

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Meeting at
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Sun Bible Classes—9 AM
Sun Worship—10 AM
Sun Eve Worship—6:00 PM
Wed Bible Class—7:00 PM

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31

All scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless

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matters about which the Bible makes positive statements that we can set aside as "non-essentials."

It seems to me (you may disagree if you want) that things are in the Bible precisely because they are important. There are many things that are not in the Bible. Those are the things that I would consider unimportant. The things that are in the Bible are there because God put them there. Who am I to declare "unimportant" what God has included. Someone says, "But it only says it one time." How many times does God have to say something before it becomes important?

Paul spoke of people learning "not to exceed what is written." Well-meaning people have been exceeding what is written, probably forever. It is hard to stick with the Scriptures. The Jews struggled with the command to rest on the Sabbath. They seemed to have argued endlessly about what was work and what was not. Then they began making rules to define what was prohibited and what was allowed.

Jesus' disciples angered them because they picked grain to eat on the Sabbath day. Jesus angered them when he healed a man with a crippled arm. The only thing Jesus did

was to say to the man, "Stretch out your hand." When the man obeyed, his hand was restored. They decided that Jesus had done "work," and began conspiring against him.

We have a saying, "One man's work is another man's pleasure." We need to be careful in labeling things "work" that God has not so labeled. We cannot alter the Word of God to make it mean what we please.

Some declare that a saved person can never be lost. It looks to me as though the letters written to Christians are concerned with exactly that issue. Why all the warnings? Why all the teaching about what Christians must do if it does not affect their salvation? What else matters? For example, Paul makes a long list of things that he calls "works of the flesh." He concludes by saying, "I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

This is in a letter to the "churches of Galatia." He is not writing to the lost, but to the saved. He does not exhort them to be saved so that these things will not affect their relationship with God, but he ex-

horts them to refrain from walking after the flesh. A saved person who neglects the Spirit and follows the flesh "will not inherit the kingdom of God." That sounds, to me, like something bad will happen to saved people who do such things.

It does not help to declare that a saved person would never do these things. Can it be that a person never knows whether he is saved until he has persevered without doing such things?

While the Bible is clear that a person can know that he is saved (see, for example 1 John 5:14) he cannot foresee what he will do in the future. Today I am saved. If tomorrow I choose to indulge the flesh in the ways of which Paul speaks, then my relationship with God has changed. God has not changed, but I have.

The apostles were sent on a mission by Jesus: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." To that God demands a response of faith, because: "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." When we lose faith, we lose the salvation that depends upon faith.

The Bible cannot be altered to please men. It stands as God's standard for judging every man. Study it, learn it, obey it, reap the blessings that God gives.