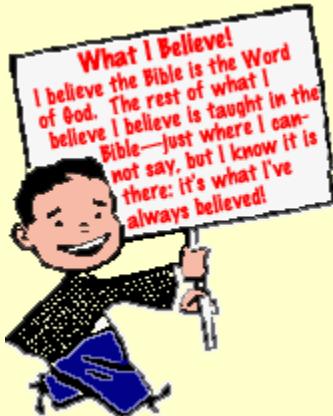


“I Believe the Bible!”

By Pastor Jeff Alexander



The man sitting across from me was both agitated and adamant. “I just don’t believe that the Bible teaches what you are telling me!” he declared. “I believe that . . .” and he asserted his belief, which differed from the position I had just set forth.

I asked him politely if he could show me in Scripture just where the Bible taught his view. He quoted part of a verse that is usually given as the stock “proof” of his position. I rejoined by turning to another passage and asking him what the apostle meant in the reference. “The Scriptures do not contradict themselves,” I asserted.

He shrugged. Then I asked him if he had ever heard his “proof-text” explained in light of my position. Surprisingly, he let me briefly explain, and when I finished, he grudgingly admitted, “Well, I can see how the passage might be interpreted differently, but I just cannot accept your view. My view must be right; it is the way I have always believed!”

“Would you be willing to study out both sides? In the interest of truth, do you not owe it to yourself to be sure your position is really the Bible position?”

“No.” He was firm, simply unwilling to study the issue further.

While not relating one specific instance, the above scenario characterizes some encounters I have had with Christians. The most disconcerting thing about these clashes is to discover how these Christians are so unlike the Bereans, who “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:10-11). Modern Christians have no trouble honoring the Bible as the Word of God, but proving from the Bible what they believe is difficult, if not impossible. Incredibly, when they realize their deficiency in the face of challenge, they just avoid the issue. They will not prepare themselves to contend for what they believe. This is a strange stance in light of Peter’s admonition to *“honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect”* (1 Pet 3:15).

Sadly, many Christians simply have neither the desire nor the skill to search the Scriptures for themselves. They tenaciously hold beliefs that, whether Biblical or not, they could never defend. The fact is, it is imperative that every Christian should know the Scriptural basis for his beliefs! Further, for one to defend his beliefs properly, he must also have a valid and proper understanding of the contrary opinion. A love of the truth requires an objectivity that says, “I want to know the truth, no matter what. I do not care on which side of the issue the truth falls.”

Jesus Christ, as Lord and Head of His church, supplies the church with every gift and grace necessary to equip her to fulfill her mission in the world. "When he ascended on high . . . he gave gifts unto men" (Eph 4:8). Among these gifts are pastor-teachers (Eph 4:11), whose divinely appointed task is to equip the saints to "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4:13-14). When pastors fail to do their job, their ill-equipped members lack the skills necessary to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). What they cannot do they will not do.

Paul warned Timothy, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Tim 4:16). Because this warning is not taken seriously, churches today pay mere lip service to the importance of Scripture. They substitute "practical Christian living" for instruction in sound doctrine. With a "practical" emphasis, the object becomes the building of a congregation, not the equipping of saints. With sound doctrine, believers are able to "give sound doctrine and also rebuke those who contradict it [Greek: *antilego* - to say against; to contradict]" (Titus 1:9).

Some churches sound Biblical because they employ Bible terms, but they give these terms their own definitions. "Fellowship" becomes "socializing," and the church becomes a kind of "tea-room." Timid invitations to members of other churches are mistaken for witnessing the gospel of Christ. Shallow discussions of a psychological nature with a few verses thrown in are confused with real Bible study. These discussions are usually "how-to's" on being better wives, mothers, and friends. They are nothing but a pooling of ignorance interspersed with looking up a verse or two. These "studies" are led by people against whom Paul warned: "Desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions" (1 Tim. 1:8).

How-to's might improve one's marriage; only sound doctrine edifies (Eph. 4:13). Serious Bible study prepares saints for holy living in this wicked and ungodly generation. "How to be a better friend" may make for a nice coffee klatch, but it hardly prepares one for spiritual combat. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:4). Properly equipping the saints prepares them "for the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:13).

Jesus said, "*I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matt 16:18). The picture Christ draws is not of the church as an impregnable fortress, secure against the fury of satanic onslaught. Rather, the picture is of an army marching against the fortress of hell. Jesus likens His church to violent men storming the battlements (Matt. 11:12). In preparation, soldiers of the cross must gird themselves with the whole armor of God and train to wield expertly the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God (Eph. 6:13-17). The church's mission is a life-and-death struggle. As Paul experienced, "*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body*" (2 Cor. 4:8-10). Paul said, "*I die daily*" (1 Cor. 15:31). Witnesses make martyrs (Greek: *martus* - "witness"). Christ promises, "*Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life*" (Rev. 2:10). It is sound doctrine that makes men faithful unto death and "*solid food is for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil*" (Heb. 5:14).

Churches today are in sad shape. Church members "*will not endure sound doctrine . . . and will turn away from listening to the truth*" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Pastors are discouraged.

"Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me" (2 Tim. 4:10). "Unskillful in the word of righteousness," many believers are "*unstable in all [their] ways*" (Heb. 5:13; James 1:8). Tragically, failure to deal seriously with doctrine not only leaves the saints "*ignorant and unstable*" (2 Pet. 3:16) but also fills the churches with those who are not saints at all. These pseudo-saints can usually be suspected because they simply have no desire to know what the Bible teaches. They will not even take the time to read the Bible, let alone study it. Since the Bible is the lifeline of the Christian faith, should not every Christian understand the vital necessity of making the Bible a staple of his daily life? But these have no love for the truth. They simply want to go to heaven when they die. They are tares sown among the wheat, and if they are in an environment where they are never challenged by the truth, they are seldom found out. But woe to them "*because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*" (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

Do these facts unsettle you? Paul warned the careless Corinthians, "*Examine yourselves to see you are in the faith. Test yourselves . . . except you are reprobate*" (2 Cor. 13:5). Are you like the Bereans, who "*received the word with all eagerness*" (Acts 17:11)? The first saints in the church at Jerusalem "*gladly received his word*" (Acts 2:41). Should not this eagerness for God's truth characterize all God's people? Should they not hunger for the knowledge of His person, His will, and His ways? "*But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.*" (Jer. 9:24). One can learn of Him only in the Word of God. Therefore, "*Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart*" (Jer. 15:16). "*I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food*" (Job 23:12).

The tragedy is that many believers are like the cartoon above. They believe that they believe the Bible, and what they hold for their beliefs they believe the Bible teaches. However, they do not know where the Bible teaches them. They know that the Bible must teach them because they have always believed that it did. Ironically, they do not know what the Bible itself teaches because they have never really gotten into the Bible. So how can they ever demonstrate that their beliefs are Biblical? On the other hand, why would they not want to find out for sure whether their beliefs were in the Bible? Maybe they don't know what they would do if they were to find out that their beliefs were really not in the Bible.

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