

Lesson #4 – The Bible – the authoritative source of our theology – 18-24 April 2020

Christ has given His word as the authoritative source of truth. “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). “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). A very reasonable exhortation this, and one that should commend itself to everybody’s good sense; yet few heed it, and many of those who profess to regard it misapply it. How are we to prove all things? By what standard shall we test them? Here is where so many fail. Most people will use their own feelings and impulses as the standard. Their natural likes and dislikes determine what they shall hold fast and what they will reject. What they think to be good, they will follow; but since human judgment is naturally controlled or at least biased by inclination and desire, it is an unsafe guide. “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 16:25). For this reason alone, if for no other, it should be apparent to all that we are not to prove all things by sampling them. A thing may taste good, and yet contain a deadly poison. He who makes it his practice to eat everything he sees, in order to find out if it is good to eat, may have his probation cut short. A man is not to dabble in every theory. He who seeks to prove every form of teaching by trying its effects on himself will fare worse than he who tries physical poisons on himself. The system cannot stand it. His nature would soon become so corrupted that he would be unable to distinguish the good, even if he got hold of it. But he would never find the good; for the forms of error are infinite, and he who sets himself to the task of investigating all error, so as to know how to avoid it, will never finish. The only thing that he will prove will be his own folly. Just as there are tests for physical poisons, which can be applied without subjecting ourselves to the influence of those poisons, so we have an infallible test of truth and error.

Sunday: Tradition – A departure from the true God reveals itself in different ways at different times in the development of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. In Elijah’s time it showed itself in making “groves” (1 Kings 18:19) and in the open worship of a false god under a distinct name (“Baal”); at the time of the first advent of our Lord it showed itself in substituting the authority of man, “the tradition of the elders” (Mark 7:3), in the place of the Word of God in matters of faith and practice. It was with reference to this very thing that Jesus said: “Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men” (Mark 7:6-8). To walk “according to the tradition of the elders,” when it is done knowingly, instead of according to the commandment of God, even though it is done by those who at the same time profess to be the children of God, is just as much a vain worship as to fall down before an image which is a doctrine of vanities.

Monday: Experience – When after forty years’ wandering in the wilderness the Israelites were about to cross the Jordan into the promised land, Joshua gave them directions about following the ark, that they might know the way they should go; for, said he, “ye have not passed this way heretofore” (Joshua 3:3-4). Thus it should always be with the people of God. A new experience should be theirs every day. For forty years the children of Israel had been wandering in the wilderness, crossing and re-crossing their path, going forward and backward, and making no real advancement. They were always in the same territory.

It need not have been so. All the progress that they made in all those years they could have made in a few days, if they had believed the Lord and obeyed His Word. Immediately after they left Egypt, the word of the Lord to Moses was, “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward” (Exodus 14:15). Going back was not in God’s plan for them. The work which He did for them that day, in dividing the Red Sea, so that they might go forward, was amply sufficient to show them the power by which they were to advance. They were always to be treading upon new ground, and consequently they would always need His guidance.

Where they failed was in assuming that after one or two experiences they had learned it all, and could manage for themselves; and this is where people are most likely to fail today. Paul wrote: “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (Hebrews 11:30). The people had absolutely nothing to do with the capture of that city;

invisible hands had thrown down its walls, without their lifting a finger; all they had had to do was to follow the Lord, and trust in Him: yet when the next city was to be taken, they thought that they knew all about how to do it. Ai was much smaller than Jericho, so they thought only a few people of Israel were needed to capture it. Besides the sin of Achan, they had “not passed this way heretofore”, they trusted to themselves and were defeated (Joshua 7:2-5).

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6). “The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). There is nothing so simple but that it needs the wisdom of God to understand it thoroughly; nothing so small but that God’s own power is needed in order that it be done properly. Someone will say, ‘I thought that we were to learn by experience, so that we could know how to do things right ourselves. What is the use of our experience, if we are never to apply it.’ Ah, the trouble is that we so often misapply experience. As such, we do not learn by experience. Take the experiences of the children of Israel. What do they teach us? – simply this, that when they trusted the Lord it went well with them, and that when they assumed that they knew how to do things themselves they made pitiable mistakes. That which all our experience should teach us is that “power belongeth unto God” (Psalm 62:11) – we have real success only as we trust Him. We are to learn by experience to trust the Lord. The fact that we go on trusting in ourselves, trying to do things, and failing, shows that we do not profit by experience.

How often after having by the grace of God successfully resisted temptation and gained a victory over some besetment, have we assumed that now we knew how to do it, and have met with shameful defeat the next time. There is no saint so skilled in the devices of Satan, and so experienced in gaining victories, that he can win one alone. Even if a man walk with God, as Enoch did, for three hundred years, he is no more able to walk alone the last day than he was the first. He is as absolutely dependent on the Lord for strength to resist at the close of that time as he was at the beginning. The one lesson God wishes men to learn is submission, and trust in Him. Only by His power are we kept. Never in time or in eternity can a saint of God stand or walk alone. The experienced Christian is not the one who tries to stand alone, but the one who has learned absolutely to trust God in every detail of life. The true overcomers are those souls who “have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:4).

Tuesday: Culture – The culture of this world is derived from the teachings of sinful men, which they have published in their books. The Bible is different, it was not written by sinful men, but “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:19). “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” May we derive our culture from the Word of God.

Wednesday: Reason – The ways of God cannot be found out by human reasoning. No one can find out anything about God, if he studies with a critical or a selfish spirit. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant” (Psalm 25:14). No man is understood except by his friends; who could expect to understand God except by loving Him? But, more than this, it should be understood that God is known only in Christ. The life of Christ is the life of God, but the life cannot be studied critically, as an artist would study a picture. We can know the life of God only as it is lived in us. “For with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light we shall see light” (Psalm 36:9). Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; therefore we must, like Paul, determine to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified (2 Cor 2:2), if we would know the truth about the ways of God.

Thursday: The Bible – “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” The Word of God is truth, and whatever is not in harmony with that is error. If we become thoroughly familiar with the Word, error will be revealed on its first approach, and we need have nothing whatever to do with it. The Word of God is His voice, and all that is necessary is for us to know that; for we do not need to talk with a stranger in order to find out if the voice is that of our most intimate friend. Least of all must it be supposed that we are to prove the Word of God itself, to see whether or not we should hold to it, or to how much we should hold fast. No; that is the standard that is already proved. “The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6). “Every word of God is pure” (Proverbs 30:5). The Word itself is good; hold it fast, prove all things by it, hold only that which the Word declares to be good.