

Fulton County Gospel News

"The Churches of Christ Salute You"

Second Class Postage Paid at Mammoth Spring, Ark.

Volume 12

Mammoth Spring, Arkansas 72554

February, 1974

Number 38

How to Better Understand the Bible!

By Bill Banks

Hosea, God's prophet, told the people of his day, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). Paul spoke of the same people, of a later generation, and said of the, "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:2,3). We must know God's word in order to live it; and we must live it in order to be righteous; and we must be righteous in order to be saved. Hence, the importance of knowing and understanding the Bible.

But many ask: "How can I understand the Bible better?" Let us suggest six things that will help in this endeavor: **FIRST, TAKE ALL THAT THE SCRIPTURES TEACH ON ANY SUBJECT.** For instance, we read in Mark 14:47 that one of the apostles of Christ took a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. When we study the other accounts of the life of our Lord we find the whole story. It was Peter who had the sword; Malchus was the man who lost his right ear; Jesus healed him. Using the same consistent method of study we know that the Savior has based salvation on believing in Him, repenting of our sins, and being baptized (Mark 16:16; Luke 24:47; Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38).

SECOND, LET THE BIBLE EXPLAIN ITSELF. A difficult prophecy in Joel, chapter two, finds its fulfillment in Acts, chapter two. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said: "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). In the Revelation, Chapter one, we are told expressly that the seven golden candlesticks were. There is no need for speculation. The Bible is indeed its own best commentary.

THIRD, REALIZE MATTERS OF EMPHASIS. In I Corinthians 1:16 we have an example of this point. Paul told the Corinthians, "For Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel." Some have concluded from this passage that baptism is unimportant and not essential. But Paul mentions in the same context that he had baptized several. In fact, in Acts 18:8 we read that under Paul's preaching "many of the

Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized" The passage in I Corinthians simply affirms what every gospel preacher knows: his main task is proclaiming the message of salvation. Anyone can do the baptizing. But when the gospel is preached as Christ commanded, people will be baptized.

FOURTH, RECOGNIZE THE FIGURES OF SPEECH. Not every verse in the Bible is written in literal language. Much of the prophetic section is highly symbolical. The book of Revelation has many signs and symbols (Revelation 1:1). When Jesus said that Herod was "an old fox" (Luke 13:32) He simply meant that Herod was clever and crafty. When our Lord told His disciples that false teachers would come as wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15) we understand that evil men would try to disguise their wickedness. Christ said that he was "the door", "the vine", "the light", and so forth. These figures of speech simply denoted various aspects of His power and relationship with mankind.

FIFTH, DO NOT LIFT A TEXT OUT OF ITS CONTEXT. In Psalms 14:1, we learn that someone said, "There is no God". But who said it? The "fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." In Romans 12:1,2, we have the very familiar charge to present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God. This is called a reasonable spiritual service. As we carefully notice the context we understand why. The beautiful closing words of Romans, chapter eleven, express the majesty of the unfathomed power of Jehovah and yet His gracious love toward us. Therefore, as a result of God's concern and provision for us we are urged to surrender our lives to Him. Another example: In I Corinthians 11:27 Christians are urged not to partake of the Lord's Supper "unworthily". Some have taught that this means we cannot partake if we have lived in an unworthy way. But the passage is speaking of the MANNER in which we observe the supper. If we fail to discern the Lord's body as we eat the bread, we violate the scriptures. It has no reference to our conduct during the week prior to the memorial feast. Of course, we are to live "soberly, righteously, and godly", but we must keep the context

(Continued on Page 4)

Gospel Preachers And 'Ear Scratchers'

PAUL'S WARNING

The apostle Paul warned that the time would come when men would "not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lust shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables", 2 Tim. 4:3-4. But Timothy was to "preach the word; be instant in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine", 2 Tim. 4:2. Men would have "itching ears" and seek preachers to "scratch" them, but Timothy received a charge from God to take not heed from such, but preach the Gospel, thus reprovng and rebuking such at all cost. Timothy was to give heed to the doctrine of God, in so doing he would save himself and those who heard him, I Tim. 4:16. This is the only kind of preacher that God recognizes today and the only kind that is worth anything to his hearers.

FULFILLED BEFORE OUR VERY EYES

This warning, or prophecy, from Paul, has been fulfilled and we see it on every hand in the religious world today. Most churches have a creed book, written by uninspired men, which gives a name to their church, tells how to organize it, how it is supported and how to "join it". If a man wants to preach for them, he is sent to one of "their schools." and learns what they will listen to from the pulpit! He can not study the Bible and preach it, if so every demoniation on earth would dry up and die! No sir, their ears are "itching" for certain words of man's wisdom, and they will "hear" nothing else! If any one doubts this, just let a denominational preacher "try the Bible" on his audience and see how long he lasts!

AMONG US

Until a few years ago we were "free" from this prophecy and warning. If a man said he was a Gospel preacher, he could safely be invited and "turn the pulpit over to him", without reservations or doubt! I am sorry, and ashamed, to admit that this is no longer true "among us"! Some of "our" preachers tell us if you preach like the Gospel preachers did in

(Continued on Page 2)

The Fulton County Gospel News

... is a monthly publication distributed free of charge to any who care to receive it. We will be happy to add any names to the regular mailing list. If you send in a name be SURE to include the Zip Code Number. It must be with each address according to the Postal regulations. This paper is supported by unsolicited contributions for which we are grateful. If you care to know of its financial status and expenses, that information will be furnished upon request.

EDITORS: Erwin Cowen
and James E. Henley.

GOSPEL PREACHERS (Con't.)

the past, "you can't find a place to preach". First, this is not true! Second, if it were, we should leave the church buildings and "take to the streets". God said that all have sinned and need a Saviour. He said the Gospel was God's power to save and to get it to the sinner that he might obey it and be saved! This is the job of the Gospel preacher! Not to find a job, but "preach the Gospel". When we stop looking for employment and begin to preach the Gospel, we have God as our employer and the whole world as our workshop!

WILL MEN LISTEN TO THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IN ITS FULLNESS?

Yes indeed, they will do it gladly! Not all, but most people will, if given the opportunity! I try real hard to preach the whole counsel of God, and according to some weak members of the church, I am being successful. Yet I have never made the first contact to any church for which I have labored; as I have been invited by the congregation to consider the work. I have never sought a Gospel meeting, yet I have preached from Florida to Nevada. In most places I have been invited back again and again, and even have standing invitations to come when ever I can. I have never been an ear "scratcher" and never will and can produce hundreds of people who will confirm the statement. Brethren, God has no demand for "ear scratchers", but a great need for Gospel preachers. May the first breed die out and the other increase! Let's do the Lord's will!

Glynn V. Purdy

A Famine Is Coming!

"The time is coming, says the Lord God, when I will send famine on the land, not hunger for bread or thirst for water, but for HEARING THE WORD OF THE LORD! Men shall stagger from north to south, they shall range from east to west, seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it."—Amos 8:11-12.

God was telling Israel of a coming famine, not a famine of food for the body, but of spiritual food, the word of God. This famine would be brought about because of Israel's attitude toward God's instructions! Perhaps we should take a close look at some of these attitudes lest we have the same type of famine brought upon us and our children, and by such a famine bring about our eternal separation from God!

(1) The word of the Lord was rejected by the people and the Priest called it a conspiracy against the king (Amos 7:10). This same priest told Amos to go some other place to do his prophesying and never come back with his message (Amos 7:12-13). They despised the law of God and refused to obey it, even telling the prophets not to speak. (Amos 2:4, 12). Isaiah also, speaking of Israel during the same period of time, said the people requested, "Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceit" (Isaiah 30:10).

(2) The people were not really interested in serving God. The service given was only an outward service, and not from the heart (Isaiah 29:13). Instead of enjoying serving God and seeing it as a privilege and an honor, they said in their hearts, "When will this Sabbath or new moon be over so we can return to our businesses?" (Amos 8:4-5).

(3) Their lives were filled with unrighteous business dealings and immorality! They were not using just weights and measures, and in this way defrauded the people for profit (Amos 8:5-6). They dishonored God through their participation in such sins as fornication and strong drink (Amos 2:7-8).

Would God bring such a spiritual famine on America? He did upon His chosen people, Israel! What makes us think that He would not do the same where we are concerned? What can we do to prevent such a famine, or to be ready for a famine if and when it does come about?

At one time a famine was to come upon the earth and God directed Joseph to build graineries to store up the food so there would be enough to sustain their lives. In like manner, we need to be busy storing up God's word in our hearts lest

Why Doesn't It Just Die?

By Ted Knight

To listen to some our brethren you would think that the church is just on the brink of death. When they look at the church all they see is weakness, unfaithfulness, and unconcern. What they fail to realize is that we usually see exactly what we look for. It seems to me that if the church is as bad off as some would have us think it is that the church should just fold up and die. Certainly if there has ever been an institution that deserves the right to do so it is the church of our Lord. The church has been insulted, abused, ridiculed, laughed at, copied, attacked by skeptics, and forsaken by many of Her own people. Some of those who still claim membership in the church are so unconcerned and uncommitted that they pose a problem for Her. Others who should love Her more than anything else on earth love Her less. If She could have killed by discouragement, she would have died a long time ago. She is old enough to have died of old age. To many people She is out of date and ill equipped to deal with problems of the twentieth century.

Though many of these things be true, the church of Christ stands today as a force against evil as She has through the centuries past. She is still beautiful and strong. She stands through those who have fought Her are already gone or will soon perish. She may have battle scars but still She stands offering hope and security to those who will come to Her. It seems that She always is there in our time of trouble and sorrow. By the scores men still love and respect Her. She is marching forward in the face of opposition and defection from within Her own ranks. Never before have so many been reached with the good news of their salvation.

Think God for the church. I love Her. She will never die. She is worthy of our love and devotion. We owe our best to Her. The day will come when Jesus will present Her to the Father. She will be rid of the battle scars and will stand victorious over all forces. May God help each of us to give our best for the church in every way.

we be caught without enough spiritual food to carry us through a famine!

Let's all determine to ATTEND EVERY BIBLE CLASS AND WORSHIP SERVICE, for they are arranged for YOUR benefit. Let's all determine to STUDY the Bible DAILY in the privacy of our own home. Let's all do our best to create a DESIRE IN OUR HEARTS for a greater understanding of God's word.

—CLB

Neither Jew, Catholic Nor Liberal

By John McRay

(Previous teacher of church history at Harding College and presently serving as Professor of Bible at David Lipscomb College.)

It has become customary to label ourselves Jew, Catholic, Protestant, or Evangelical (what George Cornell has dubbed "The Third Force in Christendom"). For most of us it would be difficult to operate without these labels because we do not want to take the time and effort to evaluate each man as individual. It is much easier to group people by zip codes or area phone numbers than to deal with them individually. Even though Jesus did not label his contemporaries, He was labelled. Some said He was a Jeremiah, Elijah, John the Baptist, or just one of the prophets (Mt. 16:14). He never identified with the Pharisees (conservatives), Sadducees (liberals), or Essenes (non-conformists), not to mention many other such sects of Jews as the pro-Roman Herodians and the anti-Roman Zealots (Canaanians). I suppose if someone had asked Him what He was, He would have replied, "I am neither Pharisee, Sadducee, nor Essene." On the other hand, maybe it would never have occurred to Him to think in such categories at all. He was interested, however, in "who men say that the Son of Man is" (Mt. 16:13), because those who branded Him hoped, in doing so, to negate His influence and deny His iniqueness.

It has been characteristic of us in the Restoration Movement to avoid labels in our attempts to be nothing more or less than Christians. This "label" given at Gentile Antioch in the days of the Apostles has long been regarded as sufficient (Acts 11:26). Increasingly, however, voices are raising themselves in fear and panic across the brotherhood denouncing any who may differ with their opinions on any matter and labelling them "liberal" or "modernist". In a recent discussion with the nervous, frightened, but sincere editor of a newsletter, I commented, "Must I agree with you on everything in order to be sound?" He replied, "Well, I agree with the New Testament!!" I could not help but kindly remind him never to change his opinion on anything because he would then be wrong. It is a rare privilege to be in the presence of such confidence, if not infallibility. One gets the feeling in such company that there is no longer any need to study the Scripture; he needs only to write a few brethren and enclose a return address postcard on which the official answer to his question may be sent!

And if labelling were not sufficient we are also faced with guilt by association. Someone is a "liberal" because he is a "bosom buddy" of someone else who is assumed to be a "liberal." Sounds reminiscent of such statements as "He eats with sinners"; or "he must be one of them because he is a Galilean." Paul was almost murdered because he associated with Trophimus who was assumed to have gone into the Holy Sanctuary of the Temple.

The Church of Christ today is facing one of the most critical periods of its history, as are many of the religious bodies of our nation. It is of enough that we are facing a virtually atheistic world, almost overwhelmed with decaying morals, increasingly giving way to materialism. We are forced to present to such a society a church torn by self-appointed guardians of orthodoxy, dedicated to witch-hunting and the destruction of any who fail to see things as they do. The spirit of arrogance, pride, fear and virtual infallibility among the citizens often stands out more clearly than the weaknesses of those who are being criticized. And the irony of it all is that dedication to truth-seeking (and by that I mean seeking to understand the absolute truth revealed in the Bible) is regarded by these defenders as a mark of modernism.

Recently a well-known preacher in the Church of Christ stated in a lecture before a distinguished faculty of graduate educators, "One does not need to know Biblical languages in order to evaluate translations of the Bible. He only needs to compare the translations with the truth."

The time seems long overdue for someone to ask the obvious. What is a liberal? What is a modernist? Can a man be regarded as unsound and unfaithful to Jesus and the Holy Scripture who believes in One God who is over all and through all and in all; who believes that Jesus is the Son of the Living God; who believes that there is One Spirit and One Baptism, One Faith, One Body (the Church), One Hope; who believes in the verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible; who believes in the virgin birth of Jesus; who believes in the miracles of His ministry and His resurrection from the dead; who believes in the absolute nature of the truth He preached (through recognizing the inadequacy of human understanding of some of the truth); who believes that the New Testament reveals the proper nature and organization of the church; who believes the New Testament is the final authority, the last will and testament of the Christian religion?

(Continued on Page 4)

Was Jesus a Liberal?

Jesus was not a liberal! But some of the religious leaders of his day thought he was. They accused him of madness, having a devil, being a Samaritan, they accused him of moral looseness -- "A man gluttonous and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners" and a religious blasphemer! But he wasn't! They twisted his words and actions and even found him guilty of blasphemy and crucified him because they took his words out of context! (John 2:19-21, Matt. 26:60-62).

Yet Jesus was devoted to God's word! He quoted it, proclaimed it and lived it! He never discredited the word of God! But he did question and discredit traditions.

Take the Sabbath traditions. The O.T. had specified that the Sabbath was a holy day. Its sacredness was upheld and taught. But the leaders of Jesus' day went to an extreme and became most dogmatic in their interpretations. They bound their interpretations of the Law on all the people. They made their convictions and opinions of the Sabbath day LAW and put it above the welfare of the people.

Then came Jesus! Jesus plucked corn and ate it on Saturday (Matt. 12:1-9; Mark 2:28-31; Luke 6:1-5). Then he healed a man with a withered hand "on Saturday" (Mark 3:1-5, Luke 5:6-11). Oh Lord, have mercy! And if that weren't enough, he healed a man with an infirmity 38 years and told him to "carry his bed" (John 5:1-9). Oh the shame of it! Then he healed a blind man (John 9:16). And also a man with the dropsy "On the Sabbath" (Luke 14:1-6). This was his "liberalism."

Jesus was a liberal in matters of opinion! But this was because he was also a Restorer! It was more important to him what the word of God said, than what people interpreted it to say. This "liberalism" of Jesus in matters of opinion resulted because he understood that laws were made for the people and not people for laws! He emphasized that we need to have as much concern about people (their feelings and spiritual maturity) as we have for "orthodoxy" and "tradition". (Matt. 15). "But go and learn what that means, I will have mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13).

What does this mean? How do these "Sabbath day adventures" of Jesus apply to our brotherhood? It says that their's a vital difference that must be recognized between what the word actually says and our traditional ways of obeying that words. ("In matters of faith: unity, in matters of opinion: liberty, in all things: charity.") "Tradition" refers simply to the usual way in which we try to obey

(Continued on Page 4)

How to Better (Con't.)

intact when we study any particular passage to fully understand it.

SIXTH, PRAY AND STUDY. These two items will continue to increase our ability in the word of the Lord. We are taught to pray for wisdom (James 1:5), that we may best apply what we have learned through study. There is no substitute for dedicated daily searching of the scriptures. May we wisely budget our busy schedule of life so as to give God's will the very first place in our time and affection. With the inspired penman we exclaim: "With my whole heart have I sought thee: Oh, let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:10,11).

Was Jesus (Con't.)

God's word. In and of itself, "tradition" is good and expedient . . . UNTILL we make our traditions LAW! Further, the truth is revealed that God's word is not oppressive. Their's mercy and grace in the word! It ministers grace. So whenever our traditions become oppressive, there's need to reevaluate our position and examine what the word actually says.

-Michael Hall

Neither Jew (Con't.)

This is not modernism. And it is high time that some who have been accused of being disloyal to God's Word speak out and suggest that such a creed as I have just described from my own faith is the very essence of conversation of others. It leaves the judging to God. But it does express conviction and loyalty to the basic fundamentals of the New Testament. It is time to say, and to say even weeping, that there are enemies of the cross of Christ, sectarian in their attitudes, who are seeking to destroy the unity of the church of our Lord by poisonous pen and forked tongue; men who care less for truth and love than for imposition of their own opinions upon the whole brotherhood if not the entire world. For these men we pray that the love of Christ may move them to see the great damage they are doing to the cause we are all seeking to advance.

And conscience compels me to say further that it is time for men of stature and influence to speak out, to speak truth, regardless of what the cost may be to themselves. "Inasmuch as you did it not unto one of these the least of my brethren you did it not to me." I wonder, are these words less appropriate to truth than to benevolence?

Editorial

By heroic effort the Bible was first unchained from the pulpit and spread wide open in the laps of the people. Men were burned at the stake for doing it, but they ushered in an age in which naked souls were introduced to the naked word. No longer did they have to strain their religion through the mind of the hierarchy, nor their faith through the mind of a priest. The age is past when men can be told that they cannot understand the scriptures unless they be interpreted by the church. The Bible has become the living communication of a living God to a living people.

Because of the removal of Scripture from the trust of the church to the custodianship of the individual a whole new concept of religion was reborn. It embodied personal response and commitment.

Then came the Restoration. It was a noble attempt to further purify the concept of a transcendent God and a personally responsible servant-man. Along with the idea of a personal responsibility comes the crushing sense of personal guilt, with its resultant personal appreciation of grace received and personal justification confirmed. No people have desired to stand before God along like our people have desired it. They want nothing but the Bible between them and their Maker. They scorn the course of comfortable repose, enshrouded in the protective sheath of creed and church, and, rather, prefer to stand naked before God. This course carries with it an awesome responsibility.

If grace is not a commodity which the church dispenses, but is, rather, a treasure poured straight out of the windows of heaven, and if the church is not an extension of the incarnate Christ, but is, rather, a community of redeemed souls acknowledging personal responsibility and accepting personal appointment, then we do violence to New Testament Christianity when we think of the church as a spiritual bank into which we cast our deposits. Nothing could more sectarianize and denominationalize the church than for us to return to the pre-Restoration idea of the church as something of a middle-man between us and God.

We do not belong to the church; we belong to Christ. We are the church. We do not defend the church. It needs no defense. The church is subject to Christ only as individual Christians voluntarily submit themselves to Christ. The called-out ones stand alone in responsibility and stand together in fellowship. Each to his own master stands or falls. Efforts at policing the

brotherhood always have a sectarian slant.

If the struggles of the Reformation have any meaning at all for us it must be in the area of the removal of the church as God's banker of grace, and the placing of the emphasis upon the individual. We may be in danger of returning to the pre-Reformation error in our stress upon the organic nature of the church. The New Testament concept of the church is people: people who voluntarily associate themselves together in congregations for the purpose of worship. And all work is worship.

Redeemed people should look up. When they spend so much time looking at each other and, even unconsciously, judging each other, we are in trouble. To the extent to which we do it we show a sectarian spirit.

--Reuel Lemmons

RECIPE

A recipe for christian living:

- 4 cups of love
- 2 cups of loyalty
- 3 cups of forgiveness
- 1 cup of friendship
- 5 spoons of hope
- 2 spoons of tenderness
- 4 quarts of faith
- 1 barrell of laughing

Take love and loyalty mix it thoroughly with faith, blend it with tenderness, kindness, and understanding add friendship and hope sprinkle abundantly with kindness. Bake it with sunshine. Serve daily in generous helpings.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Dellhalf Church of Christ	\$5.00
Viola Church of Christ	\$5.00
Agnos Church of Christ	\$5.00
J. A. Smith	\$1.00
Jeff Church of Christ	\$5.00
Sturkie Church of Christ	\$5.00
Willford Church of Christ	\$5.00
Elizabeth Church of Christ	\$5.00
Leo C. Owen	\$2.50
Mrs. L. D. Karns	\$2.00
A member of the Church	\$6.00
Big Pond Church of Christ	\$5.00