

The Battle for the Written Word in the Church

by Keith Malcomson

Keith Malcomson's sermon highlights the critical need for the Church to uphold the authority of the written Scriptures amidst warnings of impending apostasy.

Topics: "Biblical Authority", "Apostasy Warning"

Description

Keith Malcomson emphasizes the importance of having a high regard for the written Word of God, highlighting how Christ and the apostles valued and relied on the Scriptures, which are inspired by God and profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. He points out that true Christianity is rooted in the Bible and that the same Holy Spirit inspired both the Old and New Testaments, guiding the penmen in different dispensations. However, he also warns against a horrible rebellion that will occur in the last days, where many will depart from the faith, rejecting the authority and clarity of God's written truth, leading to a great apostasy in the visible church. This rebellion will be marked by a departure from biblical Christianity, with false teachings and a rejection of the foundational truths found in the Scriptures.

Transcript

II Tim.3:14-6, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"

A HIGH REGARD FOR THE WRITTEN WORD

When we take note of the attitude of utter respect, total reliance and unquestioning confidence that Christ and the apostles, as well as the first churches they raised up, placed on the written Scriptures of the Bible, we find the example, the standard and the authority by which we are to live our Christian lives and to order the churches we are a part of. No Christian has a right to think of the written Scriptures differently than Christ and the apostles did; to think differently about the written Word than they did is a departure from true Christianity. The word "scriptures" (gramma) was only ever used by Christ and the apostles of those writings that were inspired by God Himself and written through chosen men under the influence of the Holy Spirit. They called the whole Old Testament writings the "scriptures." It is vital that we note their attitude to these writings. The written text is vital to genuine Christianity.

In the New Testament there are about 224 direct statements saying such things as "the Scripture saith" or "it is written." There are also at least 300 direct quotes from the Old Testament. This is at least four and a half percent of the New Testament. We read 56 times where these portions of the Old Testament are referred to as spoken or given by the "Lord" or the "Holy Spirit" even though they were physically written by men.

Christ in His ministry made much of the written Scriptures: "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures..." (Mt.21:42), "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures..." (Mt.22:29),"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself...And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?...Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures..." (Lk.24:27, 32, 45).

He taught in His preaching that the creation of all things had a beginning (Mk.13:19; 10:6) and that Adam and Eve were made at this beginning point as the first man and woman (Mt.19:4-6; Mk.10:6-8). He speaks of the murder of righteous Abel (Mt.23:35), the days of Noah (Mt.24:37; Lk.17:27), and of the destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah (Lk.17:29; Mt.10:15; 11:23). He speaks of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Mt.8:11; 22:32; Jn.8:56, 58) and even teaches the people that Abraham was very much alive, conscious and able to speak in paradise (Lk.16:25). He taught that in the days of Moses the Lord did indeed speak out of a burning bush (Mk.12:26), and did drop manna in the wilderness for the people to eat (Jn.6:49).

He taught that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish and then after three days preached to Nineveh (Mt.12:39-40, 41; Lk.11:30), that Elijah did indeed shut the windows of Heaven by prayer stopping the rain for three and a half years (Lk.4:25-26) and that Naaman was healed from leprosy through the ministry of Elisha (4:27). Every miracle and supernatural incident revealed in the Scriptures was accepted and preached by Christ. Christ's simple acceptance of the literal text of Scripture as being dependable, literal, historic, accurate and perfect is beyond doubt. He even revealed that when such men as Moses, David, Jeremiah, Isaiah and others spoke and wrote that it was actually the LORD speaking.

He accepted a literal interpretation of Daniel's prophesies. He never tried to explain them away or spiritualise them. He just simply said 'when you see it come to pass.' There was no doubt cast on the fact that it would happen as written (Mt.4:15; Mk.13:14). It is noteworthy that we have at the very least about 200 prophecies in the old testament concerning the coming Jewish Messiah; 25 of these were concerning His betrayal, trial, death and burial which were all fulfilled in a 24 hour period. Even when it came to spiritual warfare in resisting the temptations of Satan Christ appealed to the written scriptures. All of this was the foundation undergirding the convictions held by the apostles and the early church concerning the written Scriptures.

We could say very much more about this but let's just summarise in a few words. Matthew opens with a genealogy stretching back to Abraham and David and goes on to quote more than 40 references from the Old Testament in connection with Christ. Each of the Gospel writers back up and bases much of their fundamental teachings on the written scriptures. The Christ of the gospels is the fulfilment of more than 1500 years of writings. When the apostles preached Christ, the gospel, the new birth and the new covenant of grace they preached from the Old Testament writings. Their gospel of Christ was founded on the written scriptures as a divine revelation. The very same Holy Spirit who inspired the Old also inspired the New. The same Holy Spirit who breathed on the prophets of Old as they spoke and wrote also breathed on the apostles of the New as they preached and wrote. In this we see that the same inspiration

was given by the same person to different penmen in different dispensations.

Paul the apostle backed up his whole ministry with the conviction that the written scriptures were not only reliable but authoritative: "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures..." (Acts 17:2). When he wrote his doctrine of Christ it was based upon the "written" scriptures (I Cor.15:3-4). Luke in writing the first history of the Church in Acts gladly contends "it is written" (1:20; 7:42; 13:33; 15:15; 23:5). Peter, the great apostle to the circumcised placed the written scriptures in supreme authority over every genuine experience. He gives an example of this by stating that the written scriptures were a "more sure of prophecy" than the audible voice of God the Father on the mount: "...when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts...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" (II Pet.1:17-21).

The sum and total of this is that true Christianity is Bible Christianity and that the very highest regard is to be given to the written Word of God by the true church of Jesus Christ.

A HORRIBLE REBELLION AGAINST THE WRITTEN WORD

Christ and the apostles warned of a coming apostasy in the last days just before Christ's return which would take place in the visible church marked by a departure from the written Word. But please note: they did not say it would be a falling away from Christian activity, or from so-called outward unity, or from teachings about following after Christ or walking with Christ, or of evangelistic activity; the apostasy and rebellion would be against the clarity, simplicity and authority of God's written truth in the Church.

Paul warned the Church prophetically, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (I Tim.4:1). Here he gives a specific time which would be notable for those who would depart from "the faith." When he speaks of "the faith" he means the body of teaching that orders godly conduct in walking in the way of God--in other words the full teaching of Christ and the apostles. This departure of those from the faith would be engineered by deceiving spirits and demons that teach things contrary to the faith (Lk.8:13). This word "depart" (aphistēmi) means to remove, to instigate a revolt, to desist, desert, draw away or to fall away. Paul is speaking about a revolt, a rebellion, by those who once held to a biblical understanding of the faith.

No wonder then that Paul warns young Timothy, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim.4:3-4), and instructs Titus, "Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth" (Tit.1:13-14).

When Paul writes about "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him" he goes a little further and says, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (II Thess.2:3). This word "falling away" (apostasia) means a defection from truth or a forsaking of truth. This word apostasia is derived from ahistēmi in I Tim.4:1. Also derived from it is the word apostasion which is used three times in the bible and is always translated as "divorcement" (Mt.5:31; 19:7; Mk.10:4). Before Antichrist appears,

a great apostasy or falling away from truth will come to the visible church. It will be a rebellion, a rejection and a forsaking of biblical Christianity. Many will divorce themselves from a Christianity ruled, governed and ordered by the written scriptures.

This is just what Christ also prophesied and warned of concerning the last days before His return. When asked for a sign He answered, "Take heed that no man deceive you" (Mt.24:4). He uses this same word four times in this extensive warning about the last days and says that "many"--that is most, at least half, an abundance, a large amount--will be deceived. He is not talking about people in the world but people in the church who profess to be disciples of Christ. The chief instrument used in this deception will be false prophets (v.4, 5, 11 and 24). This word "deceive" (plana■) means to roam from safety, from the truth, to go astray, be deceived, to err, be seduced, to wander, or to be out of the way.

Today we hear an increasingly loud cry within so-called Bible-believing Evangelical churches against bibliolatry. By this term is meant Bible-idolatry or the worship of the Bible. By this term the genuine Christian who loves and believes the truth contained in the Bible, who holds fast to its divine authorship and its absolute authority in the Christians life and in church order, is mocked as a worshipper of it and of supplanting Christ by it. It is worthy of note that this term and accusation of bibliolatry began with the Catholic Church of the 16th century against those who were born-again. It was again taken up by the higher critics of Liberal Protestantism in the 19th century against those who believed the bible simply and literally. Now again in the 21st century new critics have arisen masquerading as a new brand of authentic Evangelical Christianity who are again mocking genuine believers of bibliolatry. This new so-called 'evangelical movement' professes to make much of the centrality of Christ, the headship of Christ and the all sufficiency of Christ while at the same time not holding the same view, doctrine or conviction as Christ and the apostles on the written scriptures. This is all part of a new rebellion, departure and falling away from the written scriptures within evangelicalism.

The fact is that you do not and cannot know what the centrality of Christ looks like, or the headship of Christ, or conformity to Christ, or Christian love, or unity, or discipleship, or fellowship, or the church, or holiness without the penetrating, searching, guiding light and truth of God. Move this rule to the side and anyone in the church can define anything anyway they want without challenge! And of course that would be a highway to apostasy. Those who seem to be genuine preachers, churches and movements who tamper with this principle today will find themselves in apostasy tomorrow. Of course they will profess to be just the same as they always were--or a much improved, updated, matured, contemporary version of what they were previously. This is why Christ and the apostles warned so strongly of this coming defection from biblical truth.

This is the very reason why we have in recent decades experienced such a flood of new gimmicks, strategies new ways to reach the lost and of doing church! That is why we have leaders who just share but never preach and in fact who have lost the ability to lead or to warn. That is why we have so much teaching that does not deal with sin, error or repentance. We have literally watched a church departing from the safe moorings of the truth of scripture.

While I would have loved to finish with a section on A HOLY RECOVERY OF THE WRITTEN WORD I must close this article. I do believe that the Lord is preparing to revive His remnant once more by which His truth will be recovered and restored to its rightful place, as in the days of King Josiah, and its influence will be multiplied again throughout the earth in a remarkable way, just as in the Book of Acts. I believe that amidst this terrible last end-day apostasy from God's truth in the visible church there will be one last great

ingathering of souls into the real church who will return to the written scriptures and proclaim them with great power and authority in all of the earth as a witness to a risen ascended Christ.

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