

CLARITY TRUMPET

For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. — I Corinthians 14:8, 9

Understanding the Heart of Scripture How are We Treating the Word of God? Part One

Honesty in the handling of Scripture is absolutely essential for anyone who preaches the Gospel and is serious about knowing God in a personally satisfying way.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers he commended them for their response to what he preached, and said, *“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe”* (First Thessalonians 2:13).

Several things should be noted here.

- The people recognized and accepted the fact that what they heard preached and taught by Paul was not just the words or opinions of men. Paul wasn't spouting off what others thought, or what was simply the customs of the day, or the latest popular theological theory. He wasn't political — testing the polls to see where popular opinion lay. Such things did not concern him, for he was God's messenger, not man's. He expressed this thought so well in Galatians 1:10 when he clearly said, *“For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant [bond slave] of Christ.”*

- These believers embraced all that Paul taught them *“as it is in truth, the Word of God.”* God had brought His message to them through this apostle. That was it. That settled everything. No need to add to or subtract from it; no need to debate it or to over analyze it. Oh, that we could have such childlike faith in God's Word!

- This Word, which they gladly received from God, worked effectively in those who *believed*. I don't get the feeling here that this belief is belief in Christ as Savior. They had already done that. This was a *settled belief in the settled revelation of God's Word*. It is when we literally believe what God says that its work in us is effectual. Otherwise, the Bible becomes a book we read and honor, but that's as far as it goes — even if we *say* we believe it is the Word of God. Until we *respond* to it as the living, powerful Word of the one and only God it is nothing more than a revered religious book to us, regardless what our claim to the contrary might be. When we receive it as the Thessalonian believers did it will “effectively” work in us, and not before. What we *act upon* is what we really believe; everything else is just religious talk.

Paul also wrote to the Corinthians, *“But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth (making it known, revealing it) commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God”* (Second Corinthians 4:2). *“Hidden things of shame”* are things that may be hidden for a time, but later when they are exposed they cause shame. And make no mistake about it, they *will* be exposed at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and often sooner. *“Walking in craftiness”* is the use of trickery to advance one's own cause or agenda. *“Handling the Word of God deceitfully”* speaks of falsifying the Word of God; distorting it; manipulating it for personal gain. And when Paul concluded with *“commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God”* he brought to light his own openness before God and man, but also emphasized that an open and frank declaration

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of God's Truth can always stand close scrutiny by friend or foe.

There are many within Christian circles today who often lack such a settled faith in the settled text of Scripture. I teach a course called *Modern Trends*, and a major trend today is that of casting doubts upon the validity, authority and total trustworthiness of the Bible. This is often done under the guise of making the Bible more acceptable to modern man. It's the evangelical's way of being politically correct in the religious realm. In doing so, the Scriptures themselves get watered down, twisted and manipulated to fit the felt needs of society. It is the common flaw of accommodating God's Word to man's comfort zones. That way when an unbeliever attends church he or she won't hear anything negative, frightening or socially unacceptable. The person who doesn't believe in hell will have no fear that he will hear judgment preached. The feminist will be comfortable knowing that God will be presented in a gender-neuter sense, and that there will be no hint that men are to be the primary leaders in the church, or that Christian wives are to be submissive to their husbands. And the homosexual or the couple who live together outside of marriage, won't have to fret that sin will be attacked in the sermon. All will leave the service feeling good about themselves and glad that God is just what they wanted Him to be, a benevolent grandfather-type who understands that we all fail and it is all right that we do. They say He overlooks our failings (they don't call them sins any longer).

It sometimes seems that the credibility of the Bible may be suffering more from the abuse and misuse of its "friends" than from the attacks upon it by its enemies! There will always be those who attack, smear and deny Scripture, and we should expect that. Thankfully there are satisfactory answers for every attack by skeptical unbelievers. In fact, there are no attacks that have not already been adequately answered. However, there are others who *profess* to

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believe the Bible and yet by one means or another, they misrepresent its message, cast lingering doubts about its trustworthiness, or trivialize the sacred text.

Some current examples may demonstrate what I mean.

- A growing number of ministries are following the approach to Scripture called the *Redemptive Method Hermeneutic (RMH)*. *Hermeneutics* is defined as "the art and science of interpreting Scripture." *Redemption* basically means "to purchase for the purpose of setting free." So, the *RMH* is an approach to interpreting Scripture which supposedly sets one free from the strict and literal interpretation of the Bible. The practical outworking of this approach to Bible interpretation reveals itself in some of the conclusions advocates of this method reach. For instance, to insist that an elder must be a man is viewed as a first century custom which we can ignore today. Women may be elders and pastors because we should go beyond the *letter* of Scripture while following the *spirit* of it. In the area of morals the impression is sometimes given that our treatment of the whole homosexual matter is stuck in old fashioned Biblical mind-sets that no longer apply. Therefore, it should not surprise us when some denominations welcome sexually perverted individuals as pastors or bishops, and encourage homosexual marriages. The *RMH* opens a whole can of nasty worms which should be shunned by anyone who is serious about discovering the true meaning of God's sacred text.

A major weakness in this approach is that the individual interpreter of Scripture is the one who determines what is to be applied today and what is not. *Man* becomes the authority, not the totality of God's stated Word. We need to carefully analyze every new approach to Scripture with the sure Word of God. (More examples to follow in "Part 2".)

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