

Articles and Sermons :: Not Corrupting the Word - Part 1

Not Corrupting the Word - Part 1 - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2006/5/30 16:03

Not Corrupting the Word

by J.C. Ryle

“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ”
(2 Cor. 2:17).

IT IS NO LIGHT MATTER TO SPEAK TO ANY ASSEMBLY OF IMMORTAL SOULS ABOUT THE THINGS OF GOD. But the most serious of all responsibilities is, to speak to a gathering of ministers, such as that which I now see before me. The awful feeling will come across my mind, that one single word said wrong, sinking into some heart, and bearing fruit at some future time, in some pulpit, may lead to harm, of which we cannot know the extent.

But there are occasions when true humility is to be seen, not so much in loud professions of our weakness, as in forgetting ourselves altogether. I desire to forget self at this time, in turning my attention to this portion of Scripture. If I say little about my own sense of insufficiency, do me the justice to believe, that it is not because I do not feel it much.

The Greek expression, which we have translated, “corrupt,” is derived from a word, the etymology of which is not quite agreed on by lexicographers. It either means a tradesman, who does his business dishonestly, or a vintner, who adulterates the wine which he exposes for sale. Wycliffe renders it by an obsolete phrase – “We are not of those who do a voutry the Word of God.” Tyndale renders it – “We are not of those who chop and change the Word of God.” The Rhemish version is – “We are not as many, who adulterate the Word of God.” In our margin we read – “We are not as many, who deal deceitfully with the Word of God.”

In the construction of the sentence, the Holy Ghost has inspired St. Paul to use both the negative and the positive way of stating the truth. This mode of construction adds clearness and unmistakableness to the meaning of the words, and intensity and strength to the assertion, which they contain. Instances of a similar construction occur in three other remarkable passages of Scripture, two on the subject of baptism, one on the subject of the new birth. (John 1:13; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 Peter 3:21.) It will be found, therefore, that there are contained in the text both negative and positive lessons for the instruction of the ministers of Christ. Some things we ought to avoid. Others we ought to follow.

The Negative Lessons

The first of the negative lessons is, a plain warning against corrupting or dealing deceitfully with the Word of God. The Apostle says, “many” do it, pointing out to us that even in his time there were those who did not deal faithfully and honestly with God’s truth. Here is a full answer to those who assert that the primitive Church was one of unmixed purity. The mystery of iniquity had already begun to work. The lesson which we are taught is, to beware of all dishonest statements of that Word of God which we are commissioned to preach. We are to add nothing to it. We are to take nothing away.

Now when can it be said of us, that we corrupt the Word of God in the present day? What are the rocks and shoals which we ought to shun, if we would not be of the “many” who deal deceitfully with God’s truth? A few suggestions on this head may not be without use.

1) We corrupt the Word of God most dangerously, when we throw any doubt on the plenary inspiration of any part of Holy Scripture.

This is not merely corrupting the cup, but the whole fountain. This is not merely corrupting the bucket of living water, which we profess to present to our people, but poisoning the whole well. Once wrong on this point, the whole substance of our religion is in danger. It is a flaw in the foundation. It is a worm at the root of our theology. Once allow this worm to gnaw the root, and we must not be surprised if the branches, the leaves, and the fruit, little by little decay. The whole subject of inspiration, I am well aware, is surrounded with difficulty. All I would say is, that, in my humble judgment, notwithstanding some difficulties which we may not be able now to solve, the only safe and tenable ground to maintain is this – th

at every chapter, and every verse, and every word in the Bible has been "given by inspiration of God." We should never desert a great principle in theology any more than in science, because of apparent difficulties which we are not able at present to remove.

Suffer me to mention an illustration of this important axiom. Those conversant with astronomy know that before the discovery of the planet Neptune there were difficulties, which greatly troubled the most scientific astronomers, respecting certain aberrations of the planet Uranus. These aberrations puzzled the minds of astronomers, and some of them suggested that they might possibly prove the whole Newtonian system to be untrue. But at that time a well-known French astronomer, named Leverrier, read before the Academy of Science a paper, in which he laid down this great axiom, "that it did not become a scientific man to give up a principle because of difficulties which could not be explained. He said in effect, "We cannot explain the aberrations of Uranus now; but we may be sure that the Newtonian system will be proved to be right, sooner or later. Something may be discovered one day, which will prove that these aberrations may be accounted for, and yet the Newtonian system remain true and un-shaken." A few years after, the anxious eyes of astronomers discovered the last great planet, Neptune. The planet was shown to be the true cause of all the aberrations of Uranus; and what the French astronomer had laid down as a principle in science, was proved to be wise and true.

The application of anecdote is obvious. Let us beware of giving up any first principle in theology. Let us not give up the great principle of plenary inspiration because of difficulties. The day may come when they will all be solved. In the mean time we may rest assured that the difficulties which beset any other theory of inspiration are tenfold greater than any which beset our own.

2) We corrupt the Word of God when we make defective statements of doctrine.

- * We do so when we add to the Bible the opinions of the Church, or of the Fathers, as if they were of equal authority.
- * We do so when we take away from the Bible, for the sake of pleasing men; or, from a feeling of false liberality, keep back any statement which seems narrow, and harsh, or hard.
- * We do so when we try to soften down anything that is taught about eternal punishment, or the reality of hell.
- * We do so when we bring forward doctrines in their wrong proportions. We have all our favourite doctrines, and our minds are so constituted that it is hard to see one truth very clearly without forgetting that there are other truths equally important. We must not forget the exhortation of Paul, - to minister "according to the proportion of faith."
- * We do so when we exhibit an excessive anxiety to fence, and guard, and qualify such doctrines as justification by faith without the deeds of the law, for fear of the charge of antinomianism; or when we flinch from strong statements about holiness, for fear of being thought legal.
- * We do so, not least, when we shrink from the use of Bible language in giving an account of doctrines. We are apt to keep back such expressions as "born again", "election", "adoption", "conversion", "assurance", and to use a roundabout phraseology, as if we were ashamed of plain Bible words. I cannot expand these statements, for want of time. I content myself with mentioning them, and leave them to your private thought.

3) We corrupt the Word of God when we make a defective practical application of it.

We do so when we do not discriminate between classes in our congregations — when we address all as being possessed of grace, by reason of their baptism or church-membership, and do not draw the line between those who have the Spirit and those who have not. Are we not apt to keep back plain home appeals to the unconverted? When we have eight or ten hundred or two thousand persons before our pulpits, a vast proportion of whom we must know are unconverted, are we not apt to say, "Now if there be any one of you who does not know the things that are for his eternal peace" — when we ought rather to say, "If there be any of you who has not the grace of God in him"? — And are we not in danger of defective handling of the Word in our practical exhortations, by not bringing home the statements of the Bible to the various classes in our congregations? We speak plainly to the poor; but do we also speak plainly to the rich? Do we speak plainly in our dealings with the upper classes? This is a point on which, I fear, we need to search our consciences.

Re: Not Corrupting the Word - Part 1 - posted by crsschk (), on: 2006/5/30 16:27

Excellent and timely ...

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