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The Savior Or The Scriptures?, on: 2012/1/27 13:58

Throughout history men have fallen into one extreme view or another. This is as true in the spiritual realm as in every other realm of life. Instead of maintaining a balance of truth, we follow one truth to the neglect of an equally valid truth. Others, in reaction, may focus their attention on the neglected truth but thereby fail to give proper attention to the truth that others have wrongly made their exclusive concern. Let us explore how a proper balance has been violated in regard to two equally important and vital truths.

Our Focus on Jesus Personally:

The Lord Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). (Unless otherwise noted, the New American Standard Bible is used.) Jesus Himself is the focus of our faith, our life, and our discipleship. Again and again, Christ drew our attention to Himself Personally:

- Â· "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:7).
- Â· "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11).
- Â· "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).
- Â· "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).
- Â· "I am the true vine" (John 15:1).

This focus on the Lord Jesus is clearly revealed in John, chapter 6. Our Lord declared, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (v. 35). Throughout this chapter, Jesus emphasized how essential it is to come to Him (vv. 44-45), behold Him (v. 40), and believe in Him (v. 40). We must even "eat His flesh" and "drink His blood" (vv. 53-56). Only through personally appropriating Him or spiritually consuming Him will we "live forever" (vv. 51,58) and "not die" (v. 50). Only through Him can we have life in ourselves (v. 53), an eternal life (v. 54) that issues in the resurrection (v. 54). Through responding to Jesus personally, particularly in His flesh and blood sacrifice, we will abide in Him and He in us (v. 56). Indeed, our entire life now and forever is utterly dependent on our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ Jesus knows that our spiritual life now and eternally is directly related to Him personally. In the words of the hymn writer, we must cry to the Lord, "Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord, my spirit pants for Thee, O living Word." word he shall never see death" (8:51). While discussing the truth with His opponents, Jesus showed His entire devotion to God's Word with the statement: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (10:35). Jesus held the Word of God in highest esteem. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus said, in prayer to the Father, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (17:17). Jesus so elevated His words that He could affirm, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35).

Not only did the Lord Jesus emphasize His Word (which was actually the Word of God), but this same theme is conveyed in the remainder of the New Testament. In the book of Acts, the apostles began to "speak the word with boldness" (4:31) and were careful not to "neglect the word of God" (6:2). The Samaritans and the Gentiles "received the word of God" (8:14; cf. 11:1). Sergius Paulus "sought to hear the word of God" (13:7) and nearly the whole city of Antioch "assembled to hear the word of God" (13:44; cf. v. 46). We also notice that "the word of God kept on spreading" (6:7) and "the word of the Lord continued to grow and be multiplied" (12:24; cf. 19:20). When Paul preached Christ to the Bereans, "they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so" (17:11).

As we continue reading, repeatedly we find references to the Word of God. In Romans, Paul uses the Scriptures, or the written Word of God, as the basis of his reasoning and argument. He frequently quotes it to end all disputes. He asks, "What does the Scripture say?" (Romans 4:3). To Paul, God's Word is inspired or God-breathed and is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" and through the written Word "the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Scriptures give encouragement (Rom. 15:4) and lead to salvation through faith in Christ (2 Tim. 3:15). The Hebrew writer reminds us that "the word of God is living and active" and is "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (4:12). Peter refers to "the living and abiding word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

An Unbalanced Focus on Either Christ or Christ's Word

We have noticed how the theme of Christ Jesus Himself and the theme of Christ's word (or God's word) are parallel themes that run through the entire New Testament. Both emphases are true and both are essential. We would have no faith in Christ Jesus were it not for the testimony to Him that the Scriptures bear. But we would have no Scriptures were it not for the fact that God inspired them to bear witness to His dear Son. Jesus Christ is the object of our faith and devotion-but so are the Scriptures, the written Word of God. From the time of Christ until the present age, men and women have often emphasized the one while neglecting the other.

Consider a prominent illustration of a nearly exclusive emphasis on the Scriptures alone. Even in the time of His earthly life, we find Jesus interacting with the Pharisees who were intense students of the Scriptures and of the accumulated traditions that were meant to interpret the Scriptures. Yet, very often, all of this devotion to the Scriptures merely involved a dry and academic exercise of the mind that left the Pharisees void of any real devotion to God Himself-the ultimate Author of the Scriptures that they professed to know and obey!

Jesus exposed this hypocrisy by saying to them, "I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves" (John 5:42). He said that they were hypocrites who were outwardly righteous and devoted to God but inwardly they were "full of robbery and self-indulgence . . . of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matt. 23:25,28). They worshipped and honored God with their lips but their hearts were far away from Him (Matt. 15:8-9). Although they studied the Scriptures, they did not understand them or the power of God (Matt. 22:29).

The tragedy of the Pharisees was that they seemed to be devoted to the Scriptures but in reality they closed their hearts to God and to His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). They searched for eternal life in the Scriptures and, in a sense, this is the very source of our knowledge of salvation and Him who gives it (2 Tim. 3:15). But the tragedy is that they went no further than this. They were unwilling to come to Christ Himself, the author and object of Scripture, that they might indeed have eternal life! The example of the Pharisees should be a warning to us of the danger of emphasizing the written Word of God while neglecting a warm and loving relationship with God through Christ Himself!

Others besides the Pharisees have had a misplaced emphasis on the text of Scripture without the needful and corresponding love for the Author of the Scriptures-the very God who inspired them! They too have stressed the importance of knowing the Scriptures. They may spend countless hours reading, studying, and meditating on the written Word of God. All of this is good-and needful. But these same people who seem to be devoted to the Bible may be spiritually dead, void of the Spirit, lacking in a love for Christ, and separated from any deep emotional response to God the Father.

We must acknowledge that most professing Christians plainly do not have a burning desire to know, love, and serve Jesus Himself. They may be like those in Ephesus who left their first love (Rev. 2:4) or they may have allowed their love to "grow cold" (Matt. 24:12). They may be similar to the Laodiceans who were lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, in their devotion to the Lord (Rev. 3:15-16). They make some form of commitment, claiming to be Christians, but their hearts are not ablaze for God! They tragically "profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him" (Tit. 1:16; cf. 1 John. 2:3-6). Although they hold to "a form of godliness," they have "denied its power" (2 Tim. 3:5). Inwardly, like the Pharisees, they are cold and devoid of spiritual life.

However, in addition, we must also observe that most professing Christians do not have a burning desire to search the Scriptures, know the Scriptures, and obey the Scriptures (John 5:39-40; Luke 8:21). They have neglected to read, study, and seek truth in the written Word of God. They have either minimized the importance of the Bible or have become entangled in their "desires for other things" that "enter in and choke the word" so that "it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:19). In short, they neither have a fervent devotion to glorify and love Jesus personally nor do they have a firm commitment to His Word or delight in seeking the truth of Scripture."

Christ and His Word

Christ Jesus and His Word are so intimately related and connected that if we rightly emphasize Christ we will necessarily emphasize His Word or teaching. Likewise, the Scriptures are so centered on Christ Jesus that to focus on the Word of God is to focus on Jesus in all of His glory. We cannot divide Christ from His Word that bears witness to Him.

Notice several passages that reveal this relationship quite clearly. Jesus said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7). These two relationships-abiding in Christ Himself and His words abiding in us-cannot be divided. It is impossible to abide in Christ if we refuse to allow His words to abide in us. And it is impossible to have Christ's words abide in us if we refuse to abide in Him!

In another place, Jesus said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). Judgment will come to those who reject Jesus and do not receive His words or teachings. It is not one or the other-but both.

Consider another instance. Jesus declared, "Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:34). It is not simply being ashamed of Jesus alone but also being ashamed of His words as well. Jesus is so closely related to His words that we must not separate them.

Peter could see this relationship. After the disciples of Jesus walked away from Him because His teaching was too difficult for them (John 6:60,66), Jesus asked the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" (v. 67). Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (vv. 68-69). He was convinced that Jesus was the Holy One of God. But he also was convinced that Jesus spoke "words of eternal life." He saw the relationship between Christ and His words-a relationship that we also need to see.

At the conclusion of His "Sermon on the Plain," Jesus said, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). Once again we can see that there is a relationship between Jesus and His words. It is one thing to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and respond to Him personally but this is only genuine if one actually accepts what Jesus has taught and obeys it. One cannot accept the Person of Jesus while rejecting His teachings.

This intimate relationship between Christ and His words is seen very clearly in John 14. Notice how Jesus expresses this: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me" (v. 21a). We relate to Jesus personally when we are willing to respond to His words. He continues, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word . . . He who does not love Me does not keep My words" (vv. 23a, 24a). It is not simply a matter of loving Jesus and disregarding His words. Nor is it a matter of obeying Jesus' words and neglecting Him. Instead, we must love Him personally as well as respecting and obeying His words.

These passages are sufficient for us to see how Christ and His Word must both be accepted. We are never justified in emphasizing Christ while neglecting His Word nor are we justified in having a preoccupation with His Word while neglecting Him personally.

Similar Descriptions

Has it ever come to your attention that some of the same descriptions are given to both Christ and His Word? Notice several of these:

(a) Christ and His Word give life.

Christ: "The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25b).

Word: "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63).

(b) Christ and His Word will judge.

Christ: "Not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22).

Word: "The word I spoke will judge him on the last day" (John 12:48).

(c) Christ and His Word save.

Christ: "Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15).

Word: "In humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls" (James 1 :21b).

(d) Christ and His Word make disciples.

Christ: "Whoever does not carry his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27).

Word: "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine" (John 8:32b).

(e) Christ and His Word are truth.

Christ: "I am... the truth" (John 14:6).

Word: "I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37).

(f) Christ and His Word will prevent spiritual death.

Christ: "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die" (John 6:50).

Word: "If any one keeps My word he will never see death" (John 8:5 1).

What are we saying by these comparisons? We must conclude that these comparisons may be made because the Word of Christ is an extension of Christ Himself. Christ is revealed or manifested through His Word. Christ is so identified with His own Word that what is affirmed of Him may be affirmed of His Word. Therefore, we must never emphasize Christ to the exclusion of His Word nor must we be so engrossed in His Word that we neglect the One who gave that Word.

Christ as the Word

It is helpful for us to remember that Jesus Himself is called the "Word" (Greek, logos). John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). He then identifies this Word: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (v. 14). The Word became flesh and was born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judea 2,000 years ago. The Word was God's "personal manifestation." (W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, sv. "Word.") Thus, John could write, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (v. 18). Christ, the "Word" has made the Father known to us (cf. NIV). Therefore, His name is declared to be "the Word of God" (Rev. 19:13), and He is called "the Word of Life" by John (1 John 1:1). He has revealed or manifested or personalized God the Father to us (cf. John 14:9-11).

Christ is the personal, living "Word" of God. But He also speaks the word of God. Jesus said, "The things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world. . . . I speak these things as the Father taught Me" (John 8:26b, 28b; cf. 7:16; 8:38). In prayer to His Father, Jesus said, "Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them" (John 17:7-8a). He explains this more fully in this way: "I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me" (John 12:49-50). He said, "The word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me" (John 14:24b; cf. v. 10).

Christ's words were God the Father's words. As we listen to Christ we are listening to God speaking to us! The one who receives Christ is receiving God and the one who receives Christ's words is receiving God's words (cf. Matt. 10:40; John 13:20). The one who rejects Christ is rejecting God and the one who rejects Christ's words is rejecting God's words (cf. Luke 10:16). This shows the sober responsibility of responding to both Christ personally as well as the words of Christ!

What Have We Seen?

We began with the observation that Christ Jesus is the theme of the Scriptures (cf. Luke 24:25-26, 44-47; John 5:38-40). The Gospels reveal His coming to earth to be the Savior of the world and show how, through His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, Jesus is the only way for people to be reconciled to God. The book of Acts shows us how Christ was preached and people responded to Him for the forgiveness of their sins. The remainder of the New Testament documents show how our faith in Him is to be manifested in our personal lives and in the body of Christ or community of believers.

We also noticed how crucial the Word of God is to our life. Through God's Word we are led to faith in Christ and nourished in our spiritual life. What we know about Christ is what we have learned from the pages of Scripture. We know the will of Christ and of God from what we see in the written Word.

We know that vast numbers of professing Christians have departed from this proper balance regarding Christ and His Word. Some have searched for a rich, deep, and meaningful relationship with Christ but have neglected the written Word of God. They have wandered into mystical experiences, emotional excesses, aberrant theology, and false teaching because they have wandered from their Scriptural moorings and have suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Perhaps some few others have diligently applied themselves to the Scriptures and academic disciplines in an attempt to please God and know His will. However, they have become lost in intellectualism or tradition or cold and heartless religion. They have failed to find a rich and real relationship with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Tragically, most professing Christians have taken neither of these routes. They have neither had mystical experiences through a spiritual quest nor have they become preoccupied with God's will in Scripture. They have been content to remain in a worldly and superficial form of religion.

What does God have planned for us? God our Father has reached down to us in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, and has made provision for our present and eternal salvation from sin, death, and eternal destruction. Those who come to God through Christ enter into a deep, rich, and fulfilling fellowship with Him and with others who are savingly related to Him as His children. This personal and corporate relationship with God in the Holy Spirit has been created, formed, and sustained by God's written revelation that we know as holy Scripture. Through God's Word we are saved, forgiven, born again, and given new life; through it we grow and are nourished in our new life; and through it we are encouraged to endure to the end. The Word of God is God's divine agent in accomplishing His purposes with men and women. We disrespect God and Christ if we neglect the Scriptures, and we disrespect the Scriptures if we neglect God and Christ who give us their Word in Scripture.

God's "Love Letters"

Let us imagine that a young man loves a girl but must be parted from her for a long period of time. Each day he writes his beloved a letter, explaining his day, aspects of his character, and describing his continued love and devotion for her. What if we discover that the girl continually receives these letters of love and carefully places them on her dresser-without opening them and without reading them? She may profess to love this young man, but we must question whether she really knows the meaning of love. Why? Because the man's letters are extensions of himself; his words reveal his heart, his mind, his character, his plans, and his dreams. His words also reveal his response toward this girl whom he loves. If the girl really loves him and receives his love, she will eagerly read each letter as soon as it arrives. She will open it expectantly, read over it receptively, search out the meaning of his words and expressions, and find deep delight in his words of love toward her! If she does not respond to his words in this way, her profession of love is in vain.

There is a lesson in this illustration for us. Christ loves us and wants us to respond to Him by responding to His Word. If we do genuinely love Christ and are devoted to Him, we will have a delight in reading, studying, discussing, listening to, and meditating on His revealed Word. If we do not respond to Him by believing His Word, loving His Word, and obeying His Word, we thereby demonstrate our lack of devotion to Him personally.

Think of it in this way. Jesus said, "The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matt. 12:34b). Christ speaks to us from what fills His heart. Therefore, we learn something of the heart and mind of our Savior by being receptive to what He has spoken-whether personally or through His chosen apostles and prophets (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Thess. 4:2; 2 Peter 3:2; 1 Thess. 2:13). Since Christ's thoughts and ways are higher than our thoughts and ways (cf. Isa. 55:8-9), the only way we can learn of His mind and heart is through what He has revealed to us. This is why it is so utterly vital that we respond in faith and love to His revealed Word. And this is also why we must respond in humble submission and total obedience to what He has made known to us in Scripture. We respond to Jesus Christ personally by responding to His Word, the Scriptures!

We must never separate what God has joined. We must never seek a relationship with God or with Christ on our own terms-through subjective revelations or mystical experiences. But neither must we fall into a cold and heartless devotion to the Scriptures that leaves us devoid of spiritual life and without a warm and vibrant fellowship with God through Christ. Paul warns, "If anyone advocates a different teaching and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the teaching conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing" (1 Tim. 6:3-4a). We must have an absolute commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and we must have a like commitment to the sound words

of our Lord Jesus Christ. Anything less than this dishonors both Christ and the Word He has given.

by Richard Hollerman

<http://www.bibleviews.com/savior-scripture.html>