



Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

Volume XXIV

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Number 4

Reflection on Religious Controversies

Religious controversies are as old as religious movements. Often men establish religions or modify religions and in doing so controversy abounds. The apostle Paul writing to the Corinthian Christians in the first century made the following inspired directive: "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Cor. 11:19). A number of problems were present in the church at Corinth. These factions created religious controversy, and understanding these controversies and how they were resolved provide us an insight into how to identify and resolve religious differences.



Stearsman

In the Galatian churches Paul shows that true religion must not be modified, and that an apostle, angels, or men are not authorized to modify true religion.

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6-9).

This truth is demonstrated by Paul's rebuke of Peter (a fellow apostle) when he did not comply with the truth of the gospel and became a part of a faction creating a division between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

"But when Cephas came to Antioch, I resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned. For before that certain came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing them that were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that even Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Cephas before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest as do the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, how compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (Gal. 2:11-14 ASV).

With these reflections from the Bible in our mind, we turn now to some modern controversies among religious people. In our local paper, the Lakeland Ledger, June 7, 2003, a caption reads "**Some Baptists Reject Statement.**" The article is by Jim Jones of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. I cite some of the statements in the article for our present reflection.

"More than 40 Southern Baptist missionaries lost their jobs in May because they refused to endorse a controversial faith statement that opposes female pastors and says wives should 'graciously submit' to the servant leadership of their husbands." Again the following statement is made: "Moderate Baptists say rival conservatives have made what was meant to be a general profession of Baptist doctrine into a binding creed with specific prohibitions

and a litmus test for employment. Critics say the faith statement is sexist and elevates the Bible over personal experience with Jesus. [In the same article a missionary (Ron Gunter), cited as resigning, makes the following observation,] "affirming the statement would be like accepting a creed. 'We Baptists have no creed but the Bible.'" (I have underlined statements to make it easier for our reflections, Editor.)

Controversies recorded in the Bible as well as modern religious controversy demand serious reflections and observations.

Female Pastors

It is a common practice today for various denominations to place women in positions of leadership forbidden by the Bible. Also, it is common practice to use Bible terms in a way that the Bible does not use them. Pastors/elders of the church of Christ were to be married men (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Many use the term pastor for a preacher, when the Bible uses it for bishops and elders. This controversy will not be resolved by appealing to decisions of men. Which group will decide what is to be followed, and by what authority?

Submission

There is controversy over the submission of women to men. This has become so problematic for some that they can no longer be identified with the denominations that advocate it.

Again, how will such controversies be resolved? Who will make a decision? On what authority will the decision be made? How are we to respect the Bible's admonition in the following passage (1 Tim. 2:8-15)?

How can I harmonize the opposition of women submitting to their own husbands with the words of the apostle Paul as follows: "But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:24, ASV).

Experience with Jesus

What constitutes an objective experience with Jesus? How would we know that you had one or did not have one? Since when does a private experience in some manner overrule the clear statements of the Bible? Did not the inspired apostle Paul write: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant (1

Cor. 14:37-38). Does this passage teach that if a person's claim to be God-directed conflicts with the writings of the apostle Paul, that the personal experience claims are to be rejected? Does the same apostle Paul teach that women are to submit to men?

Baptist Churches

Since the claim is made in the article cited that Baptists have no creed but the Bible, I will ask you to reflect upon this assertion with me.

If I take the Bible as the sole creed, where can I read about the Baptist church in the pages of the Bible? Did Jesus start the Baptist church? Did Jesus die for the Baptist church (Eph. 5:25)? Is Christ the head of Baptist churches (Eph. 5:23)? Is the Baptist church under subjection to Christ (Eph. 5:24)?

Is it possible to take the Bible alone and organize a Baptist church? How would I take the Bible and qualify to be a "pastor" of a Baptist Church? Who is qualified to be a member of a Baptist Church?

These reflections are not intended to be abusive. They are designed to help us think, Editor.

Gene Burgett Report

We have now drawn well into the fall of the year. For many churches this is gospel meeting time. Before this fall season is over it will have been my privilege to participate in a couple of meetings.

September 14-17, I preached a series of lessons at the Liberty church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama. Gene Hill, a Florida School of Preaching graduate, is the preacher at the Liberty church. It was good to visit with him, but it was especially nice to have an opportunity to preach the word. Few places are more saturated with the Lord's church than Walker County, Alabama.

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Gene Burgett

The Harvesters

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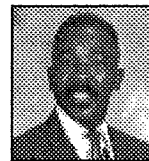
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“Do You Understand the Grace of God?”

29th Annual Lectureship — January 19-22, 2004

Jackie M. Stearsman, Director



Maurice Davis



Ted Wheeler

Monday

9:00 Who Taught You Grace? Maurice Davis
 9:40 How Are We Saved by the Grace of God? V.P. Black
 10:20 BREAK
 10:50 Grace and Longsuffering Scott Gerhardt
 11:30 LUNCH

Wednesday

9:00 What Does Grace Teach? Bill Greer
 9:40 Grace and Hebrews Timothy Kidwell
 10:20 BREAK
 10:50 Grace and Ephesians Jimmy Clark
 11:30 LUNCH



Terry W. Frizzell



Gary Summers

Forum: Grace, Law, Faith, and Works

1:30 Do You Understand Grace & Law? Brian R. Kenyon
 2:00 Do You Understand Grace & Faith? Gene Burgett
 2:30 Do You Understand Grace & Works? Ted Wheeler
 3:00 BREAK
 3:30 Forum Questions and Answers
 4:30 DINNER
 6:30 Congregational Singing
 7:00 Grace and Noah Christopher Lowe
 7:45 Grace and Human Nature Billy Lambert

Forum: Misrepresenting Grace

1:30 Is Grace Irresistible? Terry W. Frizzell
 2:00 Is Grace for the Elect Only? J. Brooks Boyd, Jr.
 2:30 Is Baptism a Sign of an Inward Grace? Steve Atnip
 3:00 BREAK
 3:30 Forum Questions and Answers
 4:30 DINNER
 6:30 Congregational Singing
 7:00 Grace, Jonah, & the Elder Brother Daniel Stearsman
 7:45 For What is Grace Sufficient? Steve Atnip



E. Claude Gardner



Chris Steele

Tuesday

9:00 Excluded from Grace Billy Lambert
 9:40 When I See the Cross V.P. Black
 10:20 BREAK
 10:50 *Grace Centered Magazine: A Critique* Terry M. Hightower
 11:30 LUNCH

Thursday

9:00 Grace and the Life of Peter Greg Littleton
 9:40 Hearing & Reading Erroneous Views E. Claude Gardner
 10:20 BREAK
 10:50 *Putting Amazing Back in Grace: A Review* Gary Summers
 11:30 LUNCH



Justin Gerhardt



Daniel Stearsman

Forum: Corrupting Grace

1:30 Receiving the Grace of God in Vain Tommy Blewett
 2:00 Turning Grace into Lasciviousness British Carlton
 2:30 Does Grace Overlook Sin? Chris Steele
 3:00 BREAK
 3:30 Forum Questions and Answers
 4:30 DINNER
 6:30 Congregational Singing
 7:00 Grace and the Conversion of Saul Justin Gerhardt
 7:45 Grace and the Nature of God Jimmy Clark

Forum: Projecting Grace

1:30 How Do We Speak with Grace? Timothy Kidwell
 2:00 How Do We Abound in Grace? Acie Sanders
 2:30 God Desires Mercy and Sacrifice Gary Summers
 3:00 BREAK
 3:30 Forum Questions and Answers
 4:30 DINNER
 6:30 Congregational Singing
 7:00 Songs of Grace Nathan Kidwell
 7:45 How May Grace Motivate Us? Dan Winkler



Scott Gerhardt



Acie Sanders



Bill Greer



Christopher Lowe



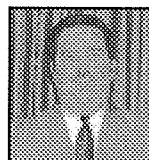
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Timothy Kidwell



Nathan Kidwell



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Brother Gus Nichols preached for the church in Jasper for many decades, and his influence is still keenly felt.

Gospel meetings tend to attract members from congregations throughout the area where the meeting is being held. For this reason they are a wonderful opportunity for me with my work for the Florida School of Preaching, as they allow me to meet people from other churches. This often leads to additional opportunities to tell people about the School.

I was one of several who spoke in a meeting in Williston, Florida the week of September 21. The entire meeting was on the church, and I addressed the need for Christian love in the church.

The Wesconnett church in Jacksonville, Florida hosts the Northeast Florida Lectureship the last week in September. The theme this year was Blessings In Christ. J.H. Blackman also spoke on this lectureship. The particular blessing in Christ I addressed was fellowship. I benefitted greatly from my preparations for this lesson and I appreciate the invitation to speak. The Westconnett church has supported the Florida School of Preaching for many years and one of their elders, Denny Smitherman, is on the board of directors.

October 12, it was my privilege to speak for the

second time before the Shiloh church of Christ in Hazel Green, Alabama. One of our graduates, Justin Gerhardt, is the preacher for the Shiloh church. The elders at Shiloh have been very encouraging of our work in training preachers, and we appreciate their kindness. We also look forward to meeting with them as opportunities arise.

I spoke during the morning assembly in Hazel Green, and then drove to Jasper, Alabama, to worship with the brethren at the Macedonia-Blackwater church of Christ. This particular Sunday evening was their monthly sing. Though I had not made any previous arrangements with them, they were kind enough to allow me to lead a couple of songs as well as offer the invitation at the conclusion of the service. I had met many of the Macedonia brethren during my meeting at the Liberty church of Christ. I enjoyed getting to know them better and I found their evangelist, Levi Sides, to be a fount of information about the church in north Alabama.

The month was completed with the annual Florida School of Preaching Booster Banquet. How wonderful it was to meet with so many who also feel very strongly about the School and the contribution it has made to the cause of Christ.



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