

## ▸ 13. What Jesus Christ Said About the New Testament

From Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, “Sensible Christianity” [an audio series]

Outline By Scott L. Keith (Concordia Univ. Irvine, Fall 1996)

### ▸ Introduction

- Now let us turn to Jesus’ approach to the New Testament.
  - You say, “What under the sun are you talking about?!”
  - “Jesus’ approach to the New Testament?! Why, the New Testament wasn’t even around when Jesus was on earth!”
  - Well, that conclusion is wrong even though the premise is true.
- True, the New Testament had *not* yet been written while Jesus was on earth. But *He nonetheless put His stamp of approval on it.*
  - How did He do this? John 14:26, John 16:1 and other similar passages talk about His promise of the Holy Spirit.
  - Jesus said, “It is expedient that I go away. By my going away, another Comforter will come, the Holy Spirit, and He will lead you into all truth.” [And] “He will bring to your remembrance all things whatsoever I have told you.”

### ▸ Total Recall

- This is a gift that we today would probably call the “gift of total recall,” and this promise was given *to the apostles.*
  - It was *not* a general promise made to everybody, but it was a promise made *to the apostles.*
  - It was on the basis of that promise that the early church collected the *writings of the apostles* and their immediate colleagues.
  - It took a while before the conclusion was reached by the church that all the materials that we now have in the New Testament were really of an apostolic character, but eventually this conclusion was reached.
- The early church was able to make these determinations because the apostles had pastorates in the major cities of the empire.
  - The strategy of the early church was to get into the cities and spread out from there.
- The Reformers of the sixteenth century reviewed this whole problem, and even Luther, who had had some real doubts about a few of the books, finally came to the conclusion that the early church was right in what it had determined.
  - The early church had a great advantage in this regard because it was closest to the time of the original writings.
  - The end result was that the New Testament materials went into the Bible *on Christ’s authority*—just as the Old Testament materials received Christ’s stamp of approval.

### ▸ Apostolic Authority

- We can actually see from the writings themselves that this kind of thing had been going on while the apostles were still alive.

- ▶ For example, Peter said in one of his letters, “Some people are twisting Paul’s writings, even as they do the other Scriptures.”
- ▶ The expression used in Greek is “the other writings” – exactly the same expression that an Orthodox Jew uses of the Old Testament.
- ▶ In other words, the same Holy Spirit inspired both the Old Testament Canon and the New Testament canon.
  - ▶ The conclusion of all this is that the Bible needs to be regarded as the very Word of God, and not simply as “a collection of human writings that point to revelation [Barth].”
  - ▶ The Bible isn’t merely “something that triggers religious experience that can be regarded as revelatory”; the Bible *is* revelatory because it *is* the very Word of God.
- ▶ **What About the Problems?**
  - ▶ But what do we do with all the supposed errors and contradictions and various problems connected with the Bible?
    - ▶ We said that the thing we need is a pattern; we need to understand what this material is supposed to be. Once we understand that (by examining *Jesus’ attitude* to Scripture), we have a structure within which we can deal with alleged “errors and contradictions” in the Bible.
  - ▶ Think of a chemist’s “balance pan.”
    - ▶ In one pan you put the “problem cases,” the supposed errors and contradictions.
    - ▶ In the other pan you put Jesus’ judgment as to what Scripture is.
    - ▶ The balance will always weigh in favor of Jesus’ judgment, which is that Scripture is the very Word of God and is therefore entirely reliable.
    - ▶ *Christ’s judgment is the judgment of God on the question*, whereas the problems are merely difficulties that you and I have as human beings looking at the text.
  - ▶ We must regard these as genuine *problems*, but we can’t regard them as *unsolvable problems*.
    - ▶ There must be a solution for them, or else Jesus would not have taken the view of the Bible that He did.
- ▶ **The Need for Humility**
  - ▶ Therefore we need an attitude of humility toward the problems we run across in the Bible.
    - ▶ We will work good and hard on the question, and generally speaking it doesn’t take all that much work to resolve these problems.
    - ▶ But if we come across problems that we cannot resolve, we will *reserve judgment*; we will *not* consider them to be *de facto* contradictions or errors.
  - ▶ Many people don’t realize that almost all the supposed errors and contradictions in the Bible have been thoroughly answered throughout church history.
    - ▶ Many people today have an attitude that might be called “historic chauvinism”: “Everyone was an idiot until I came along.”
    - ▶ They don’t take into account the fact that the Christian church has been going on for almost two thousand years now, and that a lot of people have looked at the Bible before we came along.
    - ▶ Actually, a tremendous amount of work has been done on supposed errors and contradictions.

- ▶ If we used some energy and integrity to check out some of these solutions instead of assuming that they are unsolvable problems, we would find answers to most of them.

### ▶ **Unsolvable Problems?**

- ▶ For example, a few years ago a man who disagreed with the Biblical infallibility position of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod published an article in which he said, “Here are three absolute errors in Scripture, and this disproves forever the doctrine of inerrancy of Scripture.”
  - ▶ However, two of these “errors” had been answered by Saint Jerome and Saint Augustine by correspondence in the fifth century!
  - ▶ The third problem had remained unresolved through most of Christian history. This problem had to do with the day of Christ’s crucifixion – whether it occurred on the fourteenth day of the Jewish month Nisan or on the fifteenth day of the Jewish month Nisan.
    - ▶ The synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) yield a different date from that of the Gospel of John.
- ▶ Calvin in his commentary acknowledged frankly that he didn’t know the answer to it.
  - ▶ wrote Calvin, “I’ve just got to let this problem sit. Jesus regarded Scripture as reliable, and therefore I’ve also got to regard it as reliable.”

### ▶ **The Folly of Arrogance**

- ▶ The ironic thing is that ten years before this “unsolvable problem” was presented to the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, the French Dead Sea Scroll scholar, Jobert, had found a calendar among the Dead Sea Scroll materials which has come to be called the “Jubilees Qumran” calendar, and that calendar exactly explains the variant dating.
  - ▶ The “Civil, Lunar” calendar, which has been known for centuries, explains one of these dates, and the “Jubilees Qumran” calendar explains the other.
  - ▶ It was the critics who got shot down, and it is the people who maintained a humble and believing attitude toward the Bible who ended up on top!
- ▶ Somebody has said, “If Christ is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all,” and it seems to me that this has applicability to *our view of Scripture*.
  - ▶ We’ve got to take the same view of Scripture that Jesus did; He’s got to be our Lord in reference to Scripture just as He is our Lord in reference to other things.
  - ▶ Therefore, I have no patience whatever with people in evangelical circles who think that they can take “a light view of the authority of the Bible” and still feel that they are being consistent with the *Lordship of Christ*.

### ▶ **The Role of Inerrancy**

- ▶ At the same time, however, we must recognize that the inerrancy or infallibility of Scripture is *not* a condition for salvation, nor is it something that needs to be presented in an initial apologetic.
  - ▶ The case for Christianity is completed at the point where the deity of Christ is established, and where His death for the sins of the world and His resurrection are maintained.
  - ▶ *That* is “the Gospel.”

- ▶ You don't have to go beyond that and convince the non-Christian that the entire 66 books of the Bible are valid in order for him to become a Christian.
- ▶ The reason the authority of Scripture is so important is that if you are not prepared to recognize its authority, you can leave the person to whom you're witnessing "up in the air" in such a fashion that he can doubt the deity of Christ if he thinks the Bible has no strong support for it.
  - ▶ Jesus took the attitude toward Scripture that He did. But if the non-Christian comes to think the Bible is full of errors and contradictions, he can very easily find himself rejecting the authority of Christ.
- ▶ We grow in faith by *submitting* ourselves to Scripture, and we've got to help people as soon as they become Christians to see that all of the Bible is the reliable Word of God, so that they will begin to rely on it *themselves*.
  - ▶ The person who criticizes Scripture doesn't grow from Scripture, because Scripture judges *us*—we don't judge *it*.
  - ▶ The case for the authority of Scripture is vital for Christian growth and vital for a confident attitude with regard to the authority of Christ.

### ▶ **How About the Virgin Birth?**

- ▶ What about a particular problem like the virgin birth?
  - ▶ Is it necessary to accept this in order to be saved?
  - ▶ The virgin birth is *not* an essential element of the Gospel.
- ▶ On the other hand, we should remember Augustine's little statement about baptism, which applies to all matters of the Christian faith and to all revelatory matters around the Gospel itself:
  - ▶ "It is not the *absence* of baptism that damns; it is the *despising* of baptism."
  - ▶ What this means is that if a person is ignorant of a point of Christian doctrine beyond the Gospel, he will not be condemned for ignorance on it.
  - ▶ But if he *despises* a point of Christian doctrine—even though it may not be the Gospel—that can very well result in his destruction, because the despising is an attitude in which he stands above God and judges God.
- ▶ So the virgin birth question depends entirely on what we mean by "denying the virgin birth."
  - ▶ There are people who have grown up in liberal churches in which *nobody* believes in the virgin birth or considers it as anything but mythology.
  - ▶ If you're presenting the Gospel to such a person, and that person comes to terms with the Jesus who died and rose again the third day, it may well be that at this point the person doesn't yet hold to the virgin birth of Christ.

### ▶ **Transformed by Lordship**

- ▶ However, it's a sure thing that once Christ becomes the Lord of that person's life, this Lordship is going to change that person's attitude toward a lot of things.
  - ▶ He is going to start looking at such things as the virgin birth in a much different light.
  - ▶ He will say to himself, "Well, if Jesus is indeed God Almighty, and I have accepted Him as God Almighty, and He really rose from the dead, then what's the problem with the virgin birth?"

- ▶ The virgin birth is probably what you would expect from a God who enters the world miraculously.”
- ▶ It is remarkable how a person’s view of the Bible becomes more solid as he looks at the Bible through Christ’s eyes.
  - ▶ I strongly suggest that we keep our fundamental object in mind: to get people to the cross of Christ.
  - ▶ Be an apologist for the Gospel.
  - ▶ Once the Holy Spirit is working in a person’s heart, it becomes a good deal easier to bring the person around on some of those things than previously, when the Holy Spirit was only battering on the person’s heart “from the outside.”
- ▶ **What Degree of Certainty?**
  - ▶ We emphasized previously in this book that all arguments of a synthetic character—that is, all inductive arguments—are less than 100% certain.
    - ▶ Now the question may be asked, “Doesn’t that also apply to the argument that we have been presenting for the authority of Scripture?”
    - ▶ And if that’s the case, aren’t we required to go back to some sort of “presupposition” in order to arrive at our conclusion?
      - ▶ Well, we definitely are engaged in induction, and therefore our evidence of how Jesus looked at the Bible does *not* reach 100% certainty.
      - ▶ Since our examination involves the review of factual material, we might conceivably be mistaken.
      - ▶ Maybe there is some passage we have misunderstood, and Jesus didn’t really look at it that way at all.
  - ▶ However, for nearly two thousand years people have been examining Jesus’ view of the Bible, and all three major branches of the classical Christian church—Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant—have agreed that Jesus looked at the Bible in the way we have stated.
    - ▶ Therefore, we are operating with a very *successful* kind of induction.
    - ▶ How do we “jump the gap” from high probability to certainty?
    - ▶ *Not* because of the presupposition, but because of the *weight of the evidence*.
- ▶ **Necessary Presuppositions**
  - ▶ When we talk about presuppositions, we should remember that there are certain *necessary* presuppositions that nobody can do without, and in that sense, all arguments begin with presuppositions.
    - ▶ And everybody—Christian or non-Christian—*has to* agree to these presuppositions.
    - ▶ Deductive logic is likewise a presupposition, for it derives from a presumed “Law of Non-Contradiction.”
      - ▶ How do we know that? Well, because it’s impossible to think of arguing against logic.
      - ▶ To argue against logic, you must use logic.
  - ▶ Deduction and induction—in other words, inferential operations—are *necessary* to the human situation.

- ▶ Human beings *can't operate without* these, and whether you call them by those terms or not, you engage in them.
  - ▶ To accept induction as a process *doesn't* tell you what you're going to induce, nor what the results are going to be.
  - ▶ Likewise, accepting *logic* doesn't tell you any facts about the world either, as we have already emphasized.
  - ▶ As Wittgenstein said, "Logic is the scaffolding of the world—not the world itself."
  - ▶ That is to say, if you find the scaffolding of the building on the ground, then you can get the shape of the building from the scaffolding, but you can never figure out the material it was made of.
- ▶ You have to see the building itself in order to find out what it is made of.