

Two Men Can't Agree on Religion

Two men are religious, and both seem to be sincere, but they never seem to agree on religious questions. A brief look at their applications of the Bible helps to explain their problem.

The first man views the Bible as the complete and final answer to all religious questions pertaining to salvation. For him, a clear statement from the Bible ends all controversy. His simple approach is well stated by a bumper sticker we have seen: "God said it; I believe it; that settles it." In fact, he would agree that God's word "settles it" whether he believes it or not.

The second man relies on several sources for his religious beliefs. He believes the Bible and many of his convictions are based on what the Bible says. But he also is convinced that he has been "led" into certain beliefs by the Lord. Some of those beliefs he could not defend by the Bible, and in fact, some of them seem to contradict the Bible, but he is sure that they are true, for the Lord would not have so "led" him had they not been true. One man frankly said to this writer, "I read the Bible, but I mostly just depend on the Spirit to lead me in what I believe." He has also had his beliefs verified by knowledgeable preachers, who might not be right in everything, but would hardly be wrong on any serious question of truth.

The first man reads the Bible seeking for answers from God. The second man reads the Bible for the same reason, but his perception is affected by what he has been "led to believe." He has difficulty being objective, and, in fact, he might hold to what he has been "led to believe" ahead of plain teaching of scripture. He frankly finds his likeness in the man of Colossians 2:18-19 who takes "his stand on visions he has seen" and is "not holding fast to the head" (NASV). His religious practices may be different from the man described in Colossians, but his approach to authority in religion is the same.

We do not hesitate to side with the first man in his approach. God indeed "leads" us into truth, but He does so through His inspired word. Consider the following passages: "Your word is like a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105); Sanctify them by Your truth, Your word is truth" (John 17:17); "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16-17).

The two men of our article will come to remarkable agreement when they both approach the scriptures as the final word of God, but not until then. Religious differences are not the product of scripture, but of varying attitudes toward what constitutes final authority in religion. True unity is desirable, and it can be enjoyed by those who humbly submit to God's word and will.

- by Bill Hall

On Our Way, Day By Day

Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). The "outward man" is simply the house of the inward man. Day by day that house is "decaying" and wasting away. Who, past forty, needs reminding? Nevertheless, with relentless rapping on the door of our minds come the messengers of aging; the hoary head, the stooped shoulders, the wrinkled skin, the immed vision, and all the other infirmities that won't let us forget what Paul says.

All men know that much. But God's people know something else. They know that just as surely as the outward man is decaying, the inward man is being renewed day by day. They know that for the faithful Christian, growing older means growing better. He is growing better because he is growing in the knowledge of God's word. As the newborn babe, he continually longs for the "spiritual milk which is without guile" (1 Pet. 2:2). As he grows in knowledge of the word, he also grows in the faith that is produced by the word (Rom. 10:17). As he grows in knowledge and faith, he also grows in usefulness to the cause of Christ. He is renewed in his determination to live closer to the Lord, to do what is right and oppose all wrong. In his spiritual growth, the aging Christian has learned that death is not the end, but merely a transition to something very far better. The happy anticipation of being in the Father's house makes leaving this worn out tabernacle a welcomed blessing!

That's why the apostle Paul saw death as gain. But death is gain only when living is for the Lord. Every living man knows that he will keep his appointment with death (Heb. 9:27). He should

know that living for the Lord is living at its best because it is living that prepares for death. Though the outward man is perishing and bound for the dust, we nourish and cherish him; we spare no expense to care for him and tend to his needs. Will we neglect the needs of the inward man that we know will survive the grave? With every tick of the clock and every beat of the heart we are getting closer to the end of this life.

The question is: are we getting closer to heaven?

- by **Dan Shipley**

Take Some Irons Out Of The Fire

We have a common idiom that describes someone who has 'too many irons in the fire'. The reference is to a blacksmith who is trying to work several items in the fire of his forge. In fact, he has too many objects in the fire and some will ruin before he is able to do his necessary work. Today, while there aren't many blacksmiths around, we still use the expression to describe someone who is trying to juggle too many responsibilities and activities. The end result is that some things don't get done as they should.

Christians must be careful about having 'too many irons in the fire'. Jobs, careers, educational pursuits, hobbies, recreation, kid's activities, various programs, etc., all have the potential to keep us so busy that we allow spiritual things to get crowded off (or at least seriously downgraded on) our list of priorities. We cannot afford to let this happen.

In Matthew 24:37ff, Jesus said, "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." People were, of course, very wicked in that time. But look at the list of things they were doing. Note that not all of them were necessarily sinful. But, clearly, they had excluded God from all their thoughts and plans. They had even ignored the warnings that Noah was preaching (2 Peter 2:5). They were just too busy for God – and that, friends, is TOO busy!

So, look at your schedule again. Re-evaluate your commitments and activities. Are you crowding God out of the top spot? If so, you need to 'take some irons out of the fire'. Think!

- by **Greg Gwin**