

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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Does It Matter What We Believe?

By Brian R. Kenyon

There are some in the religious world who teach and act as if it does not matter what someone believes, as long as he or she is sincere. Members of the church of Christ have even been known to say that some things, such as worship or church organization, are only “secondary” to belief in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Can this truly be so? Does the Lord care what people believe? Can some beliefs cause a person to lose his or her soul? Can a person’s beliefs influence others to lose their souls?

Paul’s words to the young evangelist Timothy shed light on these questions. The apostle wrote,

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. ¹⁶But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. ¹⁷And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; ¹⁸Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. (2 Tim. 2:15-18, KJV)

These verses shout “Yes!” to the question of whether what a Christian believes matters. Note some reasons.

The “Word of Truth” Matters

The word translated “study [be diligent, NKJ; do your best, ESV]” (from *spoudazo*, σπουδάζω) means to be eager; do one’s best, spare no effort, work hard (2 Tim. 4:9, 21; 2 Pet 1:10; 3:14). The KJV’s translation “study” is not as inaccurate as some may think, since diligence in handling aright the “word of truth” requires studying it! The word translated “rightly di-

viding [handling aright, ASV; accurately handling, NAS; rightly handling, ESV]” (from *orthotomeo*, ὀρθοτομέω) literally means to “rightly” (*ortho*) “cut” (*tomeo*), and is defined in most lexicons as to use or interpret correctly. The Greek word occurs only here in the New Testament, but is found in Proverbs 3:6; 11:5 (LXX), where it is translated “direct” in the sense of God’s word and righteousness “directing” the ways of His people.

As the fabric of a tent must be cut straight and true for proper use, “the word of truth” must be properly studied and presented to fit the Christian for proper use (cf. Jn. 8:31-32). The “word of truth” matters and every belief must harmonize with it!

“Ungodliness” Matters

Christians must avoid beliefs and teachings that lead to ungodliness (2 Tim. 2:16a). The word translated “shun [avoid, ESV],” in “shun profane and vain babblings,” means to avoid, keep clear of (cf. Tit. 3:9). “Profane [worldly, NAS; irreverent, ESV]” (from *bebelos*, βέβηλος) means vile, godless, irreligious (1 Tim. 1:9; 4:7; 6:20; Heb. 12:16). It “refers either to a thing or a person that has no relationship or connection with God whatsoever” (Arichea and Hatton 207). The term “vain babblings [idle babblings,

40th Annual Lectureship

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NKJ; empty chatter, NAS]” is foolish talk (1 Tim. 6:20)—talk that has nothing to do with godliness!

Two digressions occur when brethren fail to avoid “profane and vain babblings.” First, they become more and more ungodly (2 Tim. 2:16b). The term “ungodliness” refers to wickedness and irreverence (cf. Tit. 2:12; Jude 15, 18). “Increase” is from a Greek word that means to advance, progress, grow; or to go from bad to worse (2 Tim. 3:9, 13).

Second, those who fail to avoid “profane and vain babblings” harm others (2 Tim. 2:17). The Greek word translated “eat [spread, NKJ]” (*nome*, νομή) refers to pasture land in the only other place it occurs (Jn. 10:9). However, the word can also refer to spreading or to eating away. The damaging influence being compared to the spread of a “canker” bears this out. “Canker [cancer, NKJ; gangrene, ASV]” (from *gangraina*, γάγγραινα) refers to gangrene or cancer. It only occurs this one time in the New Testament, but it is commonly found since Hippocrates, 4th-5th centuries BC, where it was used of the “decay of tissue in a part of the body where the blood supply is obstructed by injury, disease, etc., which continually spreads” (Knight 413).

Straying from the Truth Matters

We know nothing about “Hymenaeus and Philetus,” except, as these verses state, that they were an example of those whose message, like gangrene, ate away at the health and vitality of the body of Christ! These two, and others like them, had “erred” from “the truth”

(2 Tim. 2:18). “Erred [strayed, NKJ; swerved, ESV]” (literally, miss the mark) means to lose one’s way, or leave the way (cf. 1 Tim. 1:6; 6:21). The example of their teaching given was that “the resurrection is past already,” which is also translated, “the resurrection has already happened” (ESV). “Resurrection” (from *anastasis*, ἀνάστασις) is defined as rising up; rise; resurrection (Jn. 5:29; 11:24-25; Acts 2:31; 4:2; 1 Pet. 1:3; 3:21). Paul uses the word for Jesus’ resurrection (Rom. 1:4; 6:5; Phil. 3:10), and for the general resurrection at the end of time (Acts 23:6; 24:15, 21; 1 Cor. 15:12, 13, 21, 42). In purporting this falsehood, “they made a fatal mistake, for the resurrection of the body, grounded upon the Lord’s own words, is one of the cardinal doctrines of the gospel” (cf. Jn. 5:28-29; Acts 24:14-16) (Lipscomb 219).

Ironically, there are those today, like the AD 70 proponents, who also say the resurrection is past. At the time Second Timothy was written (around AD 66/67), there were at least three reasons why some might possibly teach the general resurrection was already past (adapted from Arichea and Hatton 209). First, some may have mistakenly “identified resurrection with conversion, which is described figuratively as an experience of dying and rising with Christ,” and is accomplished through baptism (cf. Rom. 6:3-18; Col. 2:12; 3:1). Second, some may have asserted that “resurrection was not really necessary, since, as Greek philosophy teaches, human beings are by nature immortal, [continued on page 4]

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MONDAY

9:00 "When He Was Set"—Who Is Jesus? Jackie M. Stearsman
9:40 Historical Background of the Sermon Stephen Atnip
10:20 BREAK

10:50 Character of the Kingdom Stephen Atnip
11:30 LUNCH

Forum: Relationship Regulations

1:30 Murder Steven Walling
2:00 Making Oaths David Stearsman
2:30 Personal Retaliation Robert Williams
3:00 BREAK

3:30 Questions And Answers on Relationship Regulations
4:30 DINNER

6:30 Congregational Singing
7:00 Jesus' Relationship to the Law Darrin Morehouse
7:45 Character of the Kingdom's Effect on Others Michael Shepherd

TUESDAY

9:00 Completely Focusing on the Lord Kory Berry
9:40 No Need to Worry Kevin Patterson
10:20 BREAK

10:50 The Providence of God Solomon Quainoo
11:30 LUNCH

Forum: Marital Matters

1:30 Adultery George F. Beals
2:00 What Deut. 24:1-4 Actually Teaches Dewayne Bryant
2:30 Divorce and Remarriage Brian R. Kenyon
3:00 BREAK

3:30 Questions And Answers on Marital Matters
4:30 DINNER

6:30 Congregational Singing
7:00 Jesus' Teaching About Love Roderick "Rick" Evans
7:45 Jesus' Warning Against False Teachers Jimmy Clark

WEDNESDAY

9:00 How "Social" Should the Gospel Be? Jack Pinckert
9:40 OT Tithing Versus NT Giving David South

10:20 BREAK
10:50 The Value of Heavenly Treasures Jimmy Clark

11:30 LUNCH

Forum: Righteous Religion

1:30 Rendering Benevolence Sam Willcut
2:00 Praying Eric Dawkins
2:30 Fasting Jefferson Sole
3:00 BREAK

3:30 Questions And Answers on Righteous Religion
4:30 DINNER

6:30 Congregational Singing
7:00 The Strait Gate and Narrow Way Creston Frizzell
7:45 God's Standard of Judgment Terry Frizzell

THURSDAY

9:00 Condemnatory Judgment Prohibited Glen Willcut
9:40 Lax Judgment Prohibited Sam Willcut

10:20 BREAK
10:50 Proper Judgment Requirements Melvin Otey

11:30 LUNCH

Forum: "Doing Unto Others..."

1:30 Was There Racism in the Bible? Larry Williams
2:00 Race Relations in Restoration Movement B. Daugherty
2:30 Practicing the "Golden Rule" Benjamin L. Radford, Sr.
3:00 BREAK

3:30 Questions And Answers on "Doing Unto Others..."
4:30 DINNER

6:30 Congregational Singing
7:00 The Wise and Foolish Builders Kyle L. Smith
7:45 Jesus the Christ's Authority Melvin Otey

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[continued from page 2] being endowed with an immortal soul” that does not need a body fitted for eternity (cf. Acts 17:32, but see 1 Cor. 15:50-57). Third, some may have taught that “the resurrection on the Day of the Lord had already taken place, and they had missed out” (cf. 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

Whatever the reason they taught the resurrection was past, this teaching was not according to truth. To believe, teach, and/or live out of harmony with the “word of truth” is a serious matter. John wrote, “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God” (2 Jn. 9a).


Ruining the Faith of Others Matters

Paul said that Hymenaeus and Philetus’ doctrine of the resurrection already being past was cause to “overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:18b). The Greek word translated “overthrow [upsetting, ESV]” means to overturn (Jn. 2:15); bring ruin to (Tit. 1:11). Error that is believed by Christians can “overthrow the faith of some.” What Christians believe will influence others, either for good and thus bringing glory to God (Mt. 5:13-16), or for evil and thus separating others from God (cf. Mt. 23:13-15).

To ruin the faith of others is a serious matter. Jesus said,

It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! ²It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. (Lk. 17:1-2)

Conclusion

There are no unimportant teachings in “the word of truth,” the Gospel! To believe, teach, and/or practice even one thing contrary to the truth has a “domino effect,” not only jeopardizing the individual’s soul, but also the souls of others! Therefore, it does matter what we believe! Do we give diligence and believe and practice “the word of truth”? 

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- Knight, George W. *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992.
- Lipscomb, David. *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles: Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Ed. J. W. Shepherd. 1942. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1989.