

# “THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

## Is The Doctrine Of Christ Binding Today?

By Chris Simmons

In a recent article, a gentleman named Dan Billingsly raised the issue as to whether what Jesus taught during His ministry is binding on us today. In this article he sets forth that *“none of the teaching in MMLJ/BC (i.e., the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – before the cross - CS) is New Testament teaching or doctrine.”* In his conclusion he goes on to state, *“New Testament truth: none of the teaching in MMLJ/BC is New Testament doctrine. Any New Testament gospel preacher, elder, deacon, Bible class teacher, or Christian who teaches any doctrine from MMLJ/BC as the New Testament teaching of Christ and seeks to bind it on the Lord’s New Covenant church today – rejects the teaching of Christ and the apostles, and denies the true New Testament doctrine of Christ.”* Mr. Billingsly is categorically rejecting any use of the gospels in the life of a Christian today and that I would most stringently deny.

Mr. Billingsly spends a great deal of his article discussing the historical setting of the gospels and much of what he states I do not oppose. What I’m not arguing with and whole-heartedly agree with includes these key points:

- Jesus Christ, being a Jew, did in fact live under the Old Law and was responsible for obeying the Old Law. This He did perfectly, without sin (Heb. 4:14-16). We read throughout the four gospels of Jesus and His chosen apostles observing various tenets of the Old Law as his parents raised Him to do (Lk. 2:41).
- The end of the Old Covenant was marked by the death of Christ and was in full effect until then (Col. 2:14).
- Salvation and forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ was obviously not possible until Jesus shed His blood (Heb. 9:14-22) upon the cross.
- It is also granted that during His ministry, the kingdom had not yet been established (Mk. 9:1) and that all references to the kingdom in the gospels are always to something in the near future with repeated occurrences of the expression that the kingdom is **“at hand”** (Lk. 10:9-11). Neither had the church come into existence as Jesus spoke prospectively about the fact that it was something He would build (**“I will build My church,”** Matt. 11:28).
- It’s understood that a testament or a covenant is not in effect until the death of the one who made it (Heb. 9:15-18). Thus, the New Covenant was not bound upon man prior to the death of Christ.
- It’s agreed that Christians did not exist during Jesus’ time upon earth, but that designation is reserved for those who were baptized into the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins (Acts 11:26).

With these points understood, it’s a whole different matter to suggest that what Jesus taught during His ministry carries no authority for the Christian today and that nothing of what He taught is to be bound upon members of the Lord’s church. I most stringently deny such an argument and any conclusion that what Jesus taught while living in subjection to the Law of Moses has no authority over those who live after the establishment of the church and the kingdom. Any advocacy of such I believe by the scriptures is both misguided and eternally dangerous, and to promote teaching such as that is false teaching that needs to be exposed and avoided.

First of all, such a proposition ignores the fact that while a covenant is not in **“force”** while the one who made it lives, the establishment and communication of such a covenant does take place while the testator still lives, even while another covenant may be **“valid.”** We read in Hebrews 9:15-18, **“And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.”** That is, Jesus taught and established the precise substance of His covenant to govern in His kingdom prior to His death, that came into **“force”** following His death, burial and resurrection, just as a man will communicate his **“last will and**

testament,” that will only come into **“force”** and become **“valid”** after his death, while he still lives. All covenants, testaments or wills are established and defined prior to the death of the one who made it. For anyone to establish or change the terms of a covenant, testament or will after the person has already died renders it without legal authority and without legal **“force.”** It would be outrageous for a judge to conclude that now that the creator of the testament or will has deceased, it is now in effect, but I’m throwing out everything that the deceased said or wrote prior to his death and such will have no authority over those subject to the will or testament.

When Jesus spoke in what is known as the **“Sermon On The Mount”** (Matthew chapters 5-7) and said repeatedly, **“you have heard it was said ... but I say to you,”** He was not simply clarifying some misguided interpretations of the Old Law but was in fact establishing and defining His covenant, the **“second”** covenant (Heb. 10:9), the **“new”** covenant (Heb. 8:13; 9:15). If Jesus did not establish the authority of the **“new covenant”** while He lived, when did He? If we can’t read about the binding provisions of the **“better covenant”** (Heb. 7:22; 8:6) in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, then where can we read of them?

When Jesus commissioned the apostles to **“go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,”** they were to do so by **“teaching them to observe all that I commanded you”** (Matt. 28:18-20). The apostles were to go throughout the world and preach the same message that Jesus had taught and commanded them. How then can we conclude that what Jesus taught is not binding on Christians today? What He taught was to be the foundation of the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42) that they taught. As the apostles then continued in their ministry and execution of the Lord’s commission, they continued to point back to the words of Jesus Christ as the standard for teaching and preaching and conduct in the New Testament church. Notice what Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:3-5, **“If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.”** What Jesus taught is our **“doctrine conforming to godliness”** in the church today. The apostles carried out the great commission by preaching what Jesus had taught them and by pointing back to His words as that which defines **“sound”** doctrine and the **“doctrine conforming to godliness.”** How then can I not preach and teach that which Jesus taught, as recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John?

All Christians must be disciples of Jesus Christ (Acts 11:26). But how can we be disciples of someone whose teaching we are not allowed or required to follow? A disciple is simply and clearly defined as **“one who follows one’s teaching”** (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*) If all that Jesus taught has no authority in my life today, what am I to follow if I’m to be a disciple of His? If I’m to follow His teaching, where is what He taught recorded and when is it that He taught what I’m to follow? I must and I’m bound to **“abide in (His) word”** if I’m truly going to be a disciple of His (Jn. 8:31). Jesus taught with authority (Matt. 7:29; Mk. 1:22) and what He taught was not a clarification of the Law of Moses but of what would govern the citizens of His kingdom that was **“at hand.”** Jesus had to establish the foundations for His kingdom and it was only His to define how entrance into His kingdom would be attained (Matt. 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23-24; Jn. 3:5). If Jesus was not authoritatively defining how man may enter into the kingdom or church He came to establish, what kingdom is He speaking of? Another question I have is, if I’m to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 9-11), that is to make my abode in the teaching which He did, but I’m not allowed or permitted to abide in that which He taught during His ministry, what is it exactly that I’m to abide in?

I’m not sure I understand the basis then for my judgment if what Jesus taught is not binding. Jesus said in John 12:48, **“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.”** Who is to be judged by the words that Jesus spoke? Mr. Billingsly’s conclusion is that what Jesus taught only had application to the Jews living during His day. If Christ’s words were simply a restatement of the Old Law and the judgment referred to was only to be applied to the Jews, then Christ’s death was pointless because Jesus said that keeping His words would enable anyone to **“never see death”** (Jn. 8:51) – and thus, there would have been no need for a new covenant. If what Jesus taught was part of the Old covenant, and the one who followed what Jesus taught would never see death, then eternal life came through that old covenant and a new one wasn’t needed. Paul addressed this in Galatians 2:20-21, **“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”** If the words of Christ

do not apply to Christians today, then in fact, Christ died ***“needlessly”***!

The seed of woman who would crush the head of Satan would indeed come through a Jewish lineage that would include both the patriarch Abraham and David among many others, but His blessing was to be upon ***“all the families of the earth”*** and His victory over sin and death was for all mankind. Mr. Billingsley states that the gospel (i.e., the good news of salvation) which Jesus preached was the ***“Old Testament”*** gospel and that it’s only audience was for Jews in that day. It was news to me that there are two “gospels” found in the Bible. Am I wrong to conclude that if there are two gospels, then there must be two hopes? Paul clearly states though that there is but one hope (Eph. 4:4). Luke records that Jesus taught in Luke 16:16 that ***“the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since then the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one is forcing his way into it.”*** Jesus stated that the ***“gospel”*** He proclaimed was the ***“gospel of the kingdom of God”*** and not the gospel of the Old Testament. Brethren, there is but one gospel Jesus preached and it’s the good news of the salvation that’s found in His kingdom.

The conclusions of such false teaching are numerous. I cannot presume to know for certain what Mr. Billingsly’s motives for such a position are, but he does state that ***“New Covenant ‘Christians’ are forbidden (to) observe Christ’s Old Testament teaching in MMLJ/BC”*** which he points out includes the Passover feast and animal sacrifices but also that ***“this would include all teaching on marriage, divorce and (re)marriage in MMLJ/BC – especially Matthew 19.”*** While Jesus, as a devout Jew would, observed the Passover and the Sabbath day, He never taught that such observances were to be observed in His kingdom. He did however teach authoritatively on the subject of marriage and divorce in Matthew chapter 19 that I most certainly do believe is binding ***“whosoever”*** (verse 9, ASV), and not just an audience of Jews of that day. Great efforts are being made to unbind God’s will on marriage and divorce and it saddens me that one would perhaps seek that end by the means of discrediting and de-authorizing what Jesus taught during His ministry on earth.

It’s so very important that we have an accurate and responsible understanding of what Jesus Christ taught of His Father’s will during His days upon the earth. We are commanded to be those who are ***“handling accurately the word of truth”*** (2 Tim. 2:15) and always watching for those who “distort” the scriptures to the destruction of men’s souls (2 Pet. 3:16). Let me close with the words of Jesus as He said in John 5:24, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”*** –*Fifth Street East church of Christ Bulletin*, March 7, 2010. ■

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### ***“You Know How It Is”***

By Lowell Blasingame

She was a member of the local church and hadn't been at services so I called to see if she or one of the children might be sick. When she answered the phone, I explained my concern and reason for calling. She assured me that all of them were well, none of them were sick, they just had an open-house family get together with lots of relatives dropping in — “you know how it is” — and didn’t come to services!

I never cease to be amazed at the lackadaisical way in which we view our service to the Lord. Who would think of not showing up at work Monday morning, then when the supervisor calls, respond, “I’m fine, no problem, I just didn’t come in for work this morning” — and at that point swing into that “you know how it is” routine about oversleeping or relatives came in for a visit, etc. Talk until you are blue in the face and you’ll never convince me that you’d do this. In the first place you’d be too embarrassed to try to palm off on your boss such a flimsy excuse for not coming to work. In the second place, you know that no reputable company is going to tolerate such a display of irresponsibility on the part of an employee. Yet you expect the Lord to accept it!

I want to say to these folks: “NO, I don’t know how it is!” ■

**Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM**

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