

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Old Issues Do Not Fade Away

By Donnie V. Rader

Synopsis: Like the One True God who gave us the Bible, truth does not change. Truth remains constant, and error remains a continuing threat. Since Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever, saints should guard against being carried away by varied and strange teachings (Heb. 13:8-9). The article underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing doctrinal errors, as they do not naturally fade away with time.

Introduction

Religious controversy and doctrinal differences are found in nearly every book of the Bible. I suppose it would be nice if doctrinal error or an unscriptural practice would just “fade away” in time, so that the wrong is no longer wrong! We could look back at some issue wherein we stood firm against an error or practice that was contrary to the Bible, but now we can accept (or at least tolerate) the same since those things just “fade away.”

Before you laugh and dismiss this idea, that is exactly how some doctrinal errors and unscriptural practices are treated. In time, the seriousness of those issues fades and becomes insignificant to some. They treat those issues as if they don’t matter anymore. I’m guessing the old issues just “faded away.”

Truth and Error Does Not Change

The Nature of Truth—the Revealed Will of God

Jesus said, “*thy word is truth*” (John 17:17). The Psalmist said, “*your law is truth*” (Ps. 119:142), “*all your commandments are truth*” (v. 151), and “*the entirety of your word is truth*” (v. 160). When testing the spirits, one must compare what he hears to the teaching of the apostles to distinguish truth from error (1 John 4:1, 6).

The Nature of Error—Contrary to the Revealed Will of God

Paul contrasted truth to deception, delusion and lies (2 Thess. 2:10-12). When Scripture is twisted (2 Pet. 3:16), it is called error (v. 17). Again, error is that which does not agree with the apostles’ teaching (1 John 4:6).

Neither of These Two Changes

If God’s word does not change, neither does truth. If truth doesn’t change, error doesn’t change. That means that what was *true* many years ago is still true today! Likewise, what was *error* many years ago is still error today!

First Century Issues

Our point in looking at issues of the first century is to see that these errors are still error today. They have not faded with time.

- The Sadducees taught there is no resurrection (Matt. 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8).

- The Pharisees taught circumcision was binding and essential to salvation (Acts 15:5, 24; Rom. 4:9-12; Gal. 5:2-6).
- There were some at Corinth who taught there is no resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12-13).
- Hymenaeus and Philetus taught the resurrection is already past (2 Tim. 2:17-18).
- The Jews and some Gnostics taught that Jesus is not the Son of God (John 5:17-18; 2 John 7).

Again, the point to see is that these are old issues, but they have not faded away. These errors are still error!

History Repeats Itself

At Any Given Moment, What Seems Like a “New” Issue, Is Likely to Have Been an Issue in the Past.

For example, the AD 70 doctrine that teaches the second coming is already past is very similar to the doctrine that said the resurrection is already past (2 Tim. 2:18). The doctrine that says that Jesus gave up His divinity while on earth is like the doctrine that said Jesus of Nazareth was not divine (2 John 7; the Ebionites of the second century).

The institutional issues of the 1950s-60s (supporting a separate organization in benevolence) were a repeat of the principles of the issues that arose in the 1800s (the missionary society). When you hear any uncertain sound, it is altogether likely an old sound coming around again!

History Repeats Itself When We Fail to Teach on the Old Issues.

Perhaps we fail to teach on issues of the past because we think the issues have “faded away.” We may assume that everyone in the congregation already knows, thus no need to say anymore.

If we preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), we will continue to preach the basics and warn of the errors of the past. I once asked Irven Lee what one piece of advice he would give to a young preacher. His response was simply one line: “Just remember that when we teach school, we teach first grade every year.” When we fail to do that, we have a generation grow up that doesn’t possess the fundamental knowledge or discernment to know when error is taught (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16-18).

If we don’t preach on the first principles and controversies now, it won’t be long until we can’t preach on those subjects without offending weak members.

Issues That Do Not Fade

The truth is, no issue fades, for reasons we have already considered. Thus, any past issue is an issue that does not fade away.

Instrumental Music

This is a question that concerns Bible authority (Col. 3:17). There is no scriptural authority for using mechanical instruments of music in worship. Man made churches used the instruments in the reformation movement. Later in the restoration movement, it was introduced among brethren at Midway, KY, in 1859. Now, some progressive churches of Christ are using the instrument (including some in the Nashville, TN, area). Among noninstitutional brethren, some are not standing firm against it. They will agree that it is not authorized, but will not affirm that it is sinful and will break fellowship with God and faithful brethren.

Institutionalism

This too is a question of Bible authority (Col. 3:17). This was about churches supporting separate organizations such as schools, benevolent societies, and sponsoring churches as well as sundry social gospel efforts. Some now think this is an outdated issue. To them, there is no deed to beat a dead horse. Apparently, the con-

clusion is that the fight is over. Yet, today, some noninstitutional brethren will have fellowship with those among the institutional churches. Some will invite preachers from among them for meetings. Others will accept gospel meeting invitations from those churches.

We have already noted that this issue involved many of the things the church faced about a hundred years before (1800s). There are elements of this issue that are likely to surface again.

Gospel-Doctrine Distinction

The concept here is there is a difference between the “core gospel” (the deity of Christ, salvation, etc.) and “*doctrine*.” However, the New Testament makes no such distinction. Paul wrote to the saints at Rome saying they became children of God when they obeyed the “*doctrine*” (Rom. 6:17), but later said they obeyed the “*gospel*” (Rom. 10:16).

The anti-located preacher doctrine made such a distinction. Its advocates said we preach the gospel to the world and teach doctrine to the saints. Some who held that view eventually swung like a pendulum from this ultraconservative view to an extremely liberal view (using the same distinction). They advocated the grace-unity concept, arguing that we must be united on the gospel, but could differ on doctrine (including worship and the work of the church).

The “progressive” churches of Christ make the same distinction, saying they emphasize the “man, not the plan.” Those who advocate that the teaching of Christ on divorce and remarriage (Matt.19:9) does not apply to alien sinners, but only to God’s covenant people are making the same basic distinction. The gospel (the deity of Christ and what to do to be saved) applies to the alien, but the teaching of Christ does not. We are not done with this concept. It is well alive today!

Neo-Calvinism

This is a concept that advocates part of the Calvinistic thought while denying Calvinism. The Neo-Calvinist advocate the vicarious imputation of the righteousness of Christ upon the child of God. Neither Romans 4 nor any other text speaks of the righteousness of Christ being transferred to man. Here is how the doctrine works: God takes the perfect righteousness of Christ and transfers it to my account so that when God looks at me, He doesn’t see my sin, but the perfection of Christ. It works like an umbrella that covers us. Beneath that umbrella, I may be practicing something unscriptural or sinning in ignorance. However, God doesn’t take note of that, but sees the perfect righteousness of Christ.

This doctrine was advocated by the proponents of the grace-unity movement in the 1960s-70s (i.e., Ed Fudge, etc.). The same concept is advocated by some “non-institutional” preachers today. You will hear them talk about Christ’s righteousness being imputed to us. We are not done with that doctrine.

Fellowship

With every controversy, fellowship becomes an issue. Appeals are often made to Romans 14 to say that doctrinal differences are not issues of fellowship (though that text deals with matters of indifference).

Fellowship was discussed with the instrumental music issue (1800s), institutionalism (1950s-60s), and divorce and remarriage (1980s-90s).

Not only is the one who practices the wrong condemned (2 John 9), but the one whose teaching encourages the wrong is condemned (v. 10). Likewise, the one who fellowships the teacher of error is also condemned (v. 11).

Today, some (including some who have stood strong on fellowship in the past) will have fellowship and use those whose teaching they will admit is wrong. It appears that some think the fellowship issue (including the discussion of Romans 14) has just faded away. However, old issues don’t just fade away. – *Truth Magazine*, June 2024. ■

God: Architect and Framer

By Jerry Fite

Abraham is brought to our attention in Hebrews 11 as an example of one living by faith. ***“By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and make is God”*** (Heb. 11:9-10).

The contrast is made between the transitory sojourning in tents with an abiding city with foundations. The land to which he traveled, some 400 miles away, was not his own, and in this land he sojourned in tents which have no permanent foundations. He obeyed God and began his sojourning while looking for a future abode or city with permanent foundations fashioned and constructed by the same almighty and faithful God who called him. We with Abraham should be ***“seeking after the city which is to come”*** (Heb. 13:14). This city is Heaven.

Two words describe the activity of God in preparing for us this permanent city: ***“builder”*** and ***maker.”*** The word, ***“builder”*** is from the Greek word, ***“TECHNITES.”*** It denotes one who does things by “art,” therefore a craftsman (Acts 19:24, 38), or as some versions translate the word: ***“architect.”*** The word ***“maker”*** is from the Greek word, ***“DEMIOURGOS”*** and denotes “one who works for the people,” or the one who does the actual work.

God is therefore both the architect and actual framer of the city that is to come. Being of God, our heavenly abode is ***“not made with hands”*** (2 Cor. 5:1). It is eternal, having permanent foundations crafted after the wisdom and power of God.

The heavens and earth have the same architect and maker. ***“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”*** (Gen. 1:1). Jeremiah exalts God in His creative work declaring, ***“He hath made the earth by His power, He hath established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding hath He stretched out the heavens”*** (Jer. 51:15). By God’s power, the earth came into existence manifesting the blueprint produced by God’s wisdom and understanding.

God as the architect used the Word – Jesus Christ as the instrument to carry out His plan. Speaking of Jesus as the eternal Word, John claims, ***“All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that hath been made”*** (John 1:3). Psalms 33:6 reveals, ***“By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.”*** Jesus Christ is the eternal word or God who carried out the Father’s plan.

Learning more of DNA and understanding that it contains “information” in each cell, some scientists are suggesting the implication of “intelligent design.” For example, Stephen C. Meyer makes this comparison: “Just as the inscriptions on the Rosetta Stone point to the activity of an ancient scribe and the software in a computer program points to a programmer, I’ve argued that the digital code discovered with the DNA molecule suggests the activity of a designing mind in the origin of life.” (***Return of the GOD Hypothesis***, p. 6). We breathe the oxygen that plants give out, and plants use the exhaled carbon dioxide that we cannot use. Such indicates a planner or architect behind this functional exchange.

Believers in God see design in nature and say this “necessarily implies” that a designer exists. The Hebrew writer reminds us that such truth is not just implied, but specifically claimed in Scripture. God is both the architect or builder and maker of not only this world but the one to come. ■

“For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse” (Rom. 1:20, ASV).

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

Tommy Glendol McClure, Editor and Evangelist - 925-759-4357

Web Site: www.lodiCAchurchofchrist.com - Email: lodicachurchofchrist@gmail.com - Phone: 209-365-9250