

THE DISASTER AT THE END OF THE ROAD

By Donald Townsley

There are many very disturbing things that are taught today among God's people. One of the things that is being taught, in a very subtle way by some, is that we cannot understand the Bible alike. This idea has been perpetuated by denominationalism down through the years; one expects to hear such from them, but we do not expect to hear this from brethren! We who believe that the New Testament reveals a pattern for the church for all time have taught that the New Testament teaches it can be understood (Eph. 5:17; 3:4; John 7:17), and that it must be understood alike if we are to be pleasing to God and have "*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" (Eph. 4:3) A failure to accept the New Testament as the full and final revelation of God (Jude 3; II Tim. 3: 16 - 17), a revelation that can be understood (Eph. 5:17; John 7:17), will always result in division and a departure from the faith (I Cor. 10; I Tim. 4:1).

The denominational world has always viewed the Bible as an incomplete book with vague principles. Denominations of our day hold to Calvinism, neo-orthodoxy, and are filled with modernism. To the denominational world the basic fact of religion is the individual "religious experience with the Holy Spirit". This "experience", they teach, is one of "immediate contact with God by the Holy Spirit working directly upon the heart", after which, they say, God personally directs their lives. Their "experience" is the important thing with them -- it is more authoritative than the word of God! This view of God and salvation destroys the authority that the word of God is to have in directing the lives of men in obedience to Him (Matt. 28:18; II Tim. 3: 16 - 17). This philosophy of religion makes every man right in his own eyes regardless of what he might believe and practice.

Not only does the denominational world reject the Bible as a book that can be understood, the Catholic church does the same. The Catholic church has taught down through the years that the Bible is not a book that can be understood; that men are dependent on the Catholic church for guidance. The following by Francis J. Remler, C. M. (from a booklet entitled, "Can The Bible Be The Only Rule of Faith?") is an example of their attitude toward the Bible:

Speaking of the Epistles of St. Paul he writes: "In these epistles there are certain things difficult to understand, which the unlearned and the unstable distort, just as they do the rest of the scriptures also, to their own destruction. You, therefore, brethren, since you know this beforehand, be on your guard, lest, carried away by the error of the foolish, you fall away from your own steadfastness." (II Pet. 3:16)

All of which proves conclusively that Christ did not, and could not, make salvation depend on the reading of a book which offers great difficulties even to the most learned bible scholars, and which, besides, contains only a fragmentary record of all the things that Jesus did and taught for the instruction and salvation of mankind.

Notice that the verse the Catholics use to teach that the Bible cannot be understood does not teach that at all. Peter said, "*there are certain things difficult to understand*"; he did not say that they were not understandable. There is a vast difference in a thing being difficult to understand and a thing not being understandable. With this teaching the Catholic church would completely destroy faith in the Bible as the standard and guide for us today. This is one of the reasons it is so hard to reach a Catholic with the gospel.

There are signs all around us today that many brethren have been (and are being) affected with the idea that "we cannot understand the Bible alike"; that its teachings on different subjects are vague and cannot be understood alike. One brother said, "*I believe sin is one of the most vaguely defined things there is in the Bible.*" According to this statement people will have a hard time determining what sin is as they study the Bible, and if one cannot determine what sins he has committed then he cannot correct his sins. Brethren, this kind of teaching will cause people to turn from the Bible to a Calvinistic view which teaches that salvation is totally a work of God -- that man has absolutely nothing to do with it. This kind of teaching will cause people to turn to the doctrine of the "imputed righteousness" of Christ and to the "continual cleansing" position, because these doctrines (though false) give them

a sense of security. After all, if one cannot determine what sin is, then why not just let God do all the work; man can remain passive in his salvation, and everything is all taken care of! But sin is not "vaguely defined" in the word of God -- man can know what sin is.

People in the Old Testament understood the law of God. Nehemiah 8:8 says, "*So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*" The Psalmist of old said, "*The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple.*" (Psalms 119: 130). The law of Moses did not "vaguely define" sin, for the Apostle Paul said, "*I had not known sin, but by the law:*" (Rom. 7:7); neither does the law of Christ "vaguely define" sin, for John said, "*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*" (I John 3:4). The law of Christ is not vague; it can be read, studied, and understood (Eph. 3:4; II Tim. 2:15; Eph. 5:17). Paul told Timothy that God "*will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*" (I Tim. 2:4); and to the Ephesians he said, "*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*" (Eph. 5:17). Man can understand what sin is from the word of God, and he has a responsibility in receiving the forgiveness of his sins. The alien sinner must hear the gospel (Rom. 10:17), believe the gospel (Mark 16:16), repent of his sins (Acts 17:30), confess Christ (Acts 8: 37), and be baptized for the remission of his sins (Acts 2:38); the erring child of God must repent, confess his sins, and pray (Acts 8:22; I John 1:9).

Another brother said, "*And you will never -- I repeat never -- know nor understand God's will until the Holy Spirit abides in you right now.*" In an outline he prepared, this same man stated: "*Each of us must put off our old nature which is evil and gradually put on the new, pure nature of God.*" He also taught that the "natural man" of I Corinthians 2:14 is "the unregenerated man who has not been baptized". This is the Calvinist position. The Calvinist teach that man has an "evil nature" that renders him incapable of understanding the Bible until the Holy Spirit operates upon his heart giving him "enabling grace" (regenerating him). No Baptist could have taught Calvinism any plainer than did this brother! If you will study the context of I Corinthians 2:14 (beginning in chapter 1, verse 18), you will not find one thing said about the condition of the unconverted man. The contrast is not between the unconverted man and the converted man, but between man's wisdom and God's wisdom; between man's discoveries and God's revelation in the gospel. Man with his worldly wisdom can learn many things about the material universe, but worldly wisdom cannot find God or "*the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*" (I Cor. 2:9; 1:21). Natural science and philosophy have limitations. To the natural man, revelation by inspiration is foolishness; the gospel, God's wisdom, is foolishness to the man who thinks nature reveals all that can be known. Any man who depends on "nature" as the only source of knowledge cannot, and will not, receive the gospel -- "*the things of the Spirit of God.*" (I Cor. 2:14). Any man who rejects God's revelation as foolishness is a "natural man". This is what the "natural man" does -- the modernist, the evolutionist, the atheist -- all reject the revelation of God as foolishness. Man, by his senses, cannot discover one thing that is in the mind of God; he can only know the things of God by God communicating them to him through the Spirit (I Cor. 2: 9 - 13), which God has done in the gospel.

The doctrine that "we cannot understand the Bible alike" will lead us into all kinds of theories that the Bible does not teach, and will have a disastrous effect upon the spiritual well-being of all who espouse it. There is always disaster at the end of the road for those who lose faith that the Bible can be understood alike. Once a person loses faith in the sufficiency of Divine revelation -- loses faith that the revelation can be understood by all alike -- his next step is into denominationalism, Calvinism, the direct-operation of the Holy Spirit theory, the unity-in-diversity position, situation ethics, a compromise of moral principles, and ultimately, modernism! I maintain that we can understand the Bible, and we can understand it alike (I Cor. 1: 10; John 17: 20 - 21; Matt. 7:21; John 7:17; Eph. 3: 3 - 4; 5:17); in fact, we must understand it alike if we are to be pleasing to God and have "*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Eph. 4:3) -- the unity that Jesus prayed for in John 17: 20 - 21. Brother, if you are on this road, it is my prayer that you will regain your faith before it is eternally too late.