

Knowing how to please God

by Hendrik Joubert

Although most denominations claim to accept the Bible as *final* authority, not one considers it the exclusive and complete source for determining how to worship and please God. The Scriptures merely serve as a point of departure as the teachings and directions found therein are reduced to the will of men by means of interpretation. In a warning against men who will not unconditionally submit their will to that of God, Paul reminds Timothy how to keep from following in their footsteps: ***You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2Timothy 3:14-15)***

Motivated by faith in Jesus one has to search the Scriptures in order to obtain ***wisdom that leads to salvation***. In **Acts 17:11** people were praised for searching the Scriptures to make sure that the apostles were preaching the truth. Paul continues to explain the completeness, but also the exclusivity of the Bible as source as he continues: ***All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.***(2Timothy 3:16-17)

One may object that when Paul made this statement only the Old Testament was generally available as Scriptures, excluding the very letter we are quoting from. It is true that the New Testament as we know it was in the process of being revealed and written. Many consider it the work of men. A lady who served as an elder, but found herself excluded by the qualifications mentioned in the letters of Paul, solved the dilemma by saying that she has always considered Paul “*a bit of a chauvinist*.” However, the apostle Peter writes: ***...just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2Peter 3:15-16)***

Compare the phrases “***wisdom given him***” and “***inspired by God***.” Paul did not simply write his mind, he wrote by inspiration of God – what God gave him to write: ***For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:11-12)*** This he said after stating that he could not change what he preached, and uses a phrase he uses on one other occasion to put things outside the realm of possibility: ***But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1:8)***

That takes the ability to make changes to the gospel out of the hands of mere men – not even ***an angel from heaven*** has the authority to do it. In his letter to the Corinthians, who abused

the gifts of the Spirit, and especially the ability to speak in different tongues in order to preach the gospel to strangers, Paul writes: ***If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*** (1Corinthians 13:1)

It was by means of these gifts that the New Testament was being revealed: “...***which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;...***” (Ephesians 3:5) In verse 3 he explains that those who read his insight into the mystery being revealed are able to understand it. The Hebrew writer who, in the first four verses of the second chapter, supplies us with the complete process of the revelation of the New Testament of Jesus Christ. The Lord personally announced it, then it was confirmed by the witnesses of His resurrection (**John 14:25-26; 16:12-13; 1 Corinthians 15:8**) with God putting His seal on it by signs and miracles and wonders and gifts of the Spirit according to His will. These witnesses had the ability to pass on the gifts by laying their hands on other believers (**Acts 8:18**)

Return to the statement Peter made concerning the writings of Paul; it is because of this that the writings of Paul was placed as equal to the ***rest of the Scriptures*** which some ***distort to their own destruction***. (Some consider Paul a chauvinist in order to accomplish their will.)

The challenge remains to honestly search the Scriptures to determine what it is we need to do in order to please God. The most obvious would be a direct command or statement. When the Lord says ***“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”*** (Mark 16:16) we know that faith in Him and baptism is necessary for salvation. Next we may look to the inspired witnesses chosen by Jesus to preach the gospel for approved examples. When Peter preaches the first sermon after the resurrection of the Lord he tells those who believed that they needed to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. (**Acts 2:38**) We find the apostles obeying the instruction given by Jesus. Repentance is not new; the Lord announced it on many an occasion, such as is the case in **Luke 13**.

The third method is more susceptible to subjectivity – that which we learn by necessary inference. A necessary inference is an exclusive conclusion demanded by the events or words under consideration. From **Acts 8** we learn that preaching Jesus includes the Lord’s command for baptism as we read: ***Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.*** ³⁶ ***As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?”*** (Act 8:35-36)