

# The Proper Attitude Toward the Bible

Many differences between churches of Christ and denominational bodies are evident. It is not our purpose at this time to discuss all of them, but we will study the fundamental one, the one which is the cause of all the others: *our attitude toward the Bible*. In discussing the proper attitude toward the Scriptures, we must consider three principles. When we recognize the Bible's perfection, authority, and power, we will have a clear grasp of the meaning and importance of God's written revelation.

## ITS PERFECTION

The Bible is the complete will of God revealed to man. God spoke, and He has finished speaking so far as additional revelation is concerned. The fact that the Bible is perfect means that when John, exiled on Patmos, wrote the final "amen" and laid his pen aside, God's message to man was completed.

There was a time when the perfection of the Scriptures, as we are using the term, could not have been affirmed. In Old Testament times, God was gradually unfolding His will, "line on line, . . . a little here, a little there" (Isaiah 28:10b).

Even when the Old Testament was completed, God's revelation was not perfected. Jesus came and continued to reveal His Father's will. He introduced many teachings which had not been given before. "You have heard that it was said, . . . but I say to you": This statement occurred again and again in the Sermon on the Mount.

Toward the close of His earthly life, Jesus said, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). Still, more was to follow. God's revelation was not perfected at that time. Notice Jesus' next statement, though: "But when He, the Spirit of truth,

comes, He will guide you into all the truth" (v. 13a). Here is a promise that revelation would be completed in the time of the apostles. The Spirit would come to them and guide them into "all" (not "part of") the truth.

Indeed, the Spirit later came to the apostles (Acts 2:4). Did He guide them into all truth? Jesus said He would. Did He? If Jesus was true to His promise, then He did. This is the reason Peter could later say that "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, . . ." (2 Peter 1:3). James referred to the "perfect law" (James 1:25). Paul pronounced a curse upon anyone who would dare to preach a gospel other than that which he had preached (Galatians 1:8, 9).

Yes, the apostles were guided into all truth. Jesus was true to His promise. God's revelation was completed. The establishing of this fact shows that revelation has not been given since that time. It proves false the claims made by so-called "prophets" today.

## ITS AUTHORITY

The question "To whom shall we go for authority?" has long been a prominent one in the religious world. Many answers have been given, and many claims have been made. Some say for us to go to the church, but the Bible nowhere teaches this. Others say that each man should follow his own conscience. The Bible does not teach us to do this either. On the contrary, it teaches that this is not to be done (Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12). Others believe in councils, conventions, and synods. Some cling to traditionalism as a standard of authority. This was one of the practices most bitterly attacked by Christ (Mark 7:7-9).

To whom shall we go? We must go to the One who has authority, and that is Jesus (Matthew 28:18). He has "all authority." That leaves none for Moses, David, John the Baptist, the church, councils, or conscience. King Jesus has all authority.

God speaks to us today through His Son (Hebrews 1:2). When we want to settle anything in religion, we must go to Jesus. We can rely on no other. We must hear His voice and let that be final in all religious matters.

How does the King make known His will? How does Christ speak to us? Through His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20). Paul and the other inspired men were ambassadors, representatives of their King. They delivered the Word of Christ by the Holy Spirit which He had given them (Matthew 10:20). They represented Christ (John 20:20-23; Matthew 19:28). As we have already seen, they were guided into all truth. It is not surprising, then, that the Scriptures they gave us claim authority for themselves (2 John 9; Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Peter 4:11). We are to speak as "the oracles of God."

John expressed the general sentiment of the New Testament writers when, in the letter which closes the New Testament canon, he solemnly warned against adding to or taking from the book (Revelation 22:18, 19). Some have said that he was referring only to the Book of Revelation. Even if this is true, that is still the sentiment of the entire Scriptures. This attitude causes us to attempt to speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where it is silent. A proper respect for the Scriptures will not only lead us to respect what they say, but also to respect their silence. We will not ask, "Where do the Scriptures forbid it?" Rather, we will ask, "Where do the Scriptures teach it?" The establishing of this fact, the authority of the Scriptures, shows that we cannot go to any other source.

### ITS POWER

Probably one of the main reasons some have failed to realize the perfection and the authority of the Word is that they have failed to realize its power. Some have called it a "dead letter." In contrast, the writer of Hebrews called it "active and sharper than any two-edged sword" (4:12).

God's word has always been powerful and able to accomplish that which He intended for it

to accomplish. He spoke worlds into existence. He upholds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). Christ spoke and raised the dead; He spoke and calmed the angry tempest.

We consider the written documents of men more powerful and binding than their oral statements; but God's written Word is surely no less powerful than His oral word. His written Word does not create worlds, and it does not raise the dead; but it was not written for such purposes. It was given to save souls (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1, 2; James 1:21). If the word which God spoke for the purpose of raising the dead could raise the dead, then the Word He gave for the purpose of saving souls can save souls.

The Word of God gives light and understanding (Psalm 119:130). It begets (James 1:18), revives (Psalm 119:50), and purifies (John 15:3; 1 Peter 1:22). It is the power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Yes, the Word can convert. It is God's power to make Christians. After we become Christians, we need food; God's Word is that food (1 Peter 2:1, 2). In fact, the Word can make the child of God adequate and equip him for all good works (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

### CONCLUSION

Men have always been dissatisfied with God's Word. They have always wanted something else. The man in Hades wanted a messenger to go from the dead to warn his brothers (Luke 16). Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them" (Luke 16:29). Today, in addition to Moses and the prophets, we have Christ and the apostles. We must be satisfied with their message. Since the Bible is perfect, we must reject modern-day "revelation." The Bible is our authority; therefore, we must reject the doctrines and commandments of men. Since God's Word is powerful, we are not to look for miraculous, "better-felt-than-told" theories of conversion. Rather, we are to hold to the New Testament pattern of conversion.

The opinions and teachings of men, along with the heavens and the earth, will pass away; but the Word will not (2 Peter 3:10; Matthew 24:35). In this day of transitory things, how consoling it is to know that we can be anchored to that which will endure when the elements melt with fervent heat! ■