

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Jesus Refutes the Sadducees

The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine. (Matthew 22:23–33, KJV 1900)

First century Judaism was subdivided into several segments, each of whom held to their own ideas about God, His person, and His work. Of all these groups, the Sadducees were likely the least religious in any respectful sense of the word. Likely the most conservative, and probably the most faithful to Old Testament teachings, were the Essenes. We do not read specifically about them in the New Testament. Most New Testament writings deal with the scribes, those Jews who were responsible for copying and preserving the text of the Old Testament, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees.

As a class, first century Sadducees were wealthy and politically influential. It appears that they likely held control of the high priest's office (Acts 5:17) and possibly a majority of seats on the Sanhedrin Court. As noted in other studies, a simple respect for the accepted definition of the word "resurrection" affirms that the dispute between the Sadducees and other sects of first century Jews had to do with what they believed about the literal resurrection of the body in the last day. The Geneva Bible includes a simple and informative footnote on this passage.

Christ affirms the resurrection of the flesh, as opposed to the Sadducees.¹

No gnostic-like mystical explanation of the resurrection that implies any other meaning can survive this simple definition.

What did the Sadducees believe? Most important to our question is Scripture itself. From information provided by the various mentions of this sect in the New Testament, they denied the resurrection, and they rejected the existence of angels and of life after death.

¹ Copied from SwordSearcher Bible software, Matthew 22:23.

The most prominent doctrine of the Sadducees was the denial of the immortality of the soul and of the resurrection of the body. The Pharisees believed that Moses had delivered these doctrines to the elders, and that they had in turn handed them on to their successors. The Sadducees rejected all these traditions. From Acts (23:8) we learn that they believed in neither "angel or spirit." As appearances of angels are mentioned in the Law, it is difficult to harmonize their reverence for the Law with this denial. They may have regarded these angelophanies as theophanies. Josephus distinctly asserts (Ant., XVIII, i, 4) that the Sadducees believe that the soul dies with the body. They deny, he says, divine providence (BJ, II, viii, 14). Their theology might be called "religion within the limits of mere sensation."²

Given the manner in which the three synoptic Gospel (Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38) writers introduce this dialogue, it appears that the Sadducees likely posed this question in their effort to expose Jesus as a messianic pretender. It is also likely that they had used this question in many debates with the Pharisees. "Levirate" marriage was taught in Moses' Law.³

The Sadducees framed their argument on the premise that whatever relationships exist in this life

² *International Bible Encyclopedia*, 1939. Copied from SwordSearcher Bible software, Matthew 22:23.

³ The word "Levirate" refers to a brother-in-law. The practice involved a woman's brother-in-law, her husband's brothers, marrying her if her husband died, and the couple had no children to carry on their family heritage to future generations. (Deuteronomy 25:5-6; the Book of Ruth deals with this practice in greater detail)

must necessarily carry over in the resurrection. Jesus rejected their logic, as well as their denial of the resurrection.

Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. Any error drawn from a twist on Scripture's teaching can be refuted by Scripture. This is especially true if we accept that Scripture is divinely inspired and preserved. In fact, Jesus charges the Sadducees with two core errors that lead them to their denial of the resurrection. For Jesus to so directly rebuke the leaders of a leading and influential first century Jewish sect would have infuriated these people. They may have entered the discussion as something of an entertaining idea. Jesus had confronted and refuted the Pharisees. If the Sadducees were to debate with Him and succeed in confounding Him with a question regarding their fundamental belief, they would gain substantial political power. To their surprise, Jesus doesn't react to their question with confusion. He directly exposes the profound depth of their error, even by their own standards of measuring truth. The Sadducees accepted the first five books of the Old Testament, the "Law" of Moses. It is no coincidence that Jesus uses a familiar passage from Exodus, one of those five books, to refute their belief. To say to the Sadducees, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures..." and "...have ye not read..." quite emphatically repudiated their errant beliefs.

The Sadducees built their false beliefs on two flawed and errant premises.

1. They did not know the Scriptures, even the five books of Moses, nearly as well as they prided themselves and thought to know them.
2. Likewise, they grossly underestimated God's power.

The combination of two errant beliefs of this magnitude flawed the Sadducees' thinking and beliefs.

Jesus cited a well-known and simple passage from the third chapter of Exodus, part of God's conversation with Moses at the burning bush. He didn't create a complex or vague argument. He framed the simplest of points on the simplest of passages. At the time God spoke to Moses, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead for centuries. That God used the present tense verb "I am" in His response to Moses was sufficient to prove that the Sadducees' twisted view of the small portion of Old Testament Scripture that they did accept was hopelessly flawed.

We read the various accounts of Jesus confronting and rebuking the various leading Jewish sects of the first century, but we may fail to grasp the depth and richness of the value these accounts hold for us. Not only do we see Jesus' teachings

clearly, in this case His affirmation of the resurrection, but we also may learn how He approached those people. While we cannot approach believers who happen not to agree with us with the same authority as Jesus, we can well learn as much about **how** to engage believers of a different view as we can learn about the truth that Jesus taught.

How do believers of different and often conflicting ideas engage each other in dialogue regarding their differences? Do we find an acceptable model in Jesus' teachings to understand how we should engage other believers regarding areas of disagreement? I suggest that Jesus gives us a powerful example. Sadly often, sincere and well-meaning believers will follow the Sadducee model of trick questions and debate strategies to win their point, often far more bent on winning the argument than learning the truth of Scripture. They sadly fail to grasp that the word "debate" appears in the New Testament under lists of "...all unrighteousness," (Romans 1:29), **never** under the heading of admirable or desirable traits for believers to cultivate. Without necessarily intending to do so, they display an offensive and unbiblical smug attitude of "I'm right, so if you disagree with me, you are wrong. You simply do not know as much about the Bible as I know." This attitude consistently alienates people and leaves the person who displays it showing more ego than grace; "I intend to win this discussion one way or the other." Try as they might, they simply cannot reconcile this egotistical attitude with the model of Scripture. (2 Timothy 2:23-26) Folks who practice this attitude have failed to learn the most basic principle of Biblical discipleship. They do not understand that the very word "Disciple" is defined as a student, a learner, not someone who has learned it all, or who conveys the attitude of knowing more than any other believer about Scriptural teaching. When a believer engages another believer with the attitude that he knows more and better than other believers, he effectively says that he does not need to be taught; he already knows more than anyone within his circle of friends can teach him. He/She fails to grasp that this very attitude excludes them from the description of a disciple of Jesus. The plight of such believers often slowly slips into ever-increasing loneliness as the people around him/her simply and quietly avoid engaging them in dialogue on the Scriptures—or much of anything else for that matter. Most believers intensely dislike conflict, and they especially dislike exposing themselves to verbal bullying. While most believers respond to the verbal bully who tries to compel agreement with him most of the time quietly withdraw and avoid the errant believer, they should follow Scripture (Matthew 18 and Luke 17:1-6 as clear examples). We should not forget. We may err from Scripture as quickly by our words and attitudes as by our actions.

None of us, even the most studied and rightly informed, can speak with personal authority as Jesus spoke. He alone had such knowledge and authority. Even with that knowledge, He described His disposition toward His followers with "...I am meek and lowly in heart." (Matthew 11:29) The only escape for a "Debating" believer is to repent of that fleshly, ego-feeding attitude and to strive to regain Jesus' example of meekness and lowliness of heart. If he/she hopes to follow the Biblical model of discipleship, they will engage other believers as students of Scripture, not as indisputable authorities of its teachings. A student seeks to learn, and, in this case, the errant believer should repent and embrace the attitude of a student desiring to learn from his/her fellow-believer, not of an informed expert who has already learned it all.

The Greek word translated "debate" in Romans 1:29 appears some nine times in the New Testament. In those passages, the same word is translated by English words that leave no question about its meaning.

1. "Debate" in Romans 1:29.
2. "Strife" in Romans 13:13.
3. "Contentions" in 1 Corinthians 1:11.
4. "Strife" in 1 Corinthians 3:3.
5. "Debates" in 2 Corinthians 12:20.
6. "Variance," a work of the flesh, in Galatians 5:20.
7. "Strife" in Philippians 1:15, a context that deals with believers who teach the truth of Jesus with wrong motives.
8. "Strife" in 1 Timothy 6:4.
9. "Contentions," something that believers should avoid, not cultivate or develop to a base art, in Titus 3:9.

Given these passages, no believer can or should defend or cultivate an argumentative or debating attitude toward other believers. And, given the severity of this trait, believers who encounter another believer who has fallen into this sinful attitude, or one who is flirting with it, should be approached by his/her brothers and sisters in kind grace—and, most of all—in faith toward God. (Luke 17:1-6) To ignore a brother or sister in such error is equivalent to throwing them away by cold isolation. To approach and admonish them in faith, grace, and godly love is to seek their recovery to profitable edification.

Scripture consistently establishes that the teaching authority in a church setting is the pastor, whose primary role is that of teacher. (Ephesians 4:11) The debating believer will often either reject or contradict his/her pastor's authority and often attempt to supplant the pastor by becoming a respected teaching authority in the church of his/her membership. Yes, I have observed almost as many women in churches who fell into this errant attitude as men. The point from Scripture is clear. We should avoid, not imitate the argumentative or

debating mindset of the Pharisees and Sadducees in favor of the meek and lowly in heart example of Jesus. We should never expect to truly win an argument with another believer by words alone, unless our attitudes and actions model Jesus. While we cannot speak with personal authority as Jesus spoke, "But I say unto you..." we should appeal to Scripture for our beliefs. And, as we appeal to Scripture, we must avoid our private, often esoteric ideas in favor of the more obvious and accepted interpretations of other believers in the church. Scripture affirms the point. The Lord's church, not a self-proclaimed expert in the church, is the "...pillar and ground of the truth." (2 Timothy 3:15)

Whether in the form of ancient Sadducees or, more contemporary to the apostles, the teachings of ancient gnostics, a fundamental premise of Biblical truth that forms the essential foundation for other Biblical truth is this doctrine of the resurrection. (Acts 17:8) One of its basic principles is one of its practical realities. We shall spend eternity in glory, resurrected body, soul, and spirit, praising God for redemption (Revelation 5:9). How then do we treat each other, and thereby, indirectly Jesus, (Matthew 25:40), because we know this glorious truth?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor