



Communicating Sound Doctrine

What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. (1 Corinthians 14:36-38)

A book I was recently reading made a worthy point that relates to this passage. The Greek word for "Praise" or "Honor" in the New Testament is the root for our English word "Doxology." From the beginning of the Christian faith, believers have faced the need to distinguish truth from error, right "Praise" from wrong "Praise." This gives rise to the necessity for faithful believers to move from "Doxology," "Praise," to "Orthodoxy," "Right praise." Wrong "Praise" is in fact no praise to the Lord at all. Jesus reminded the Samaritan woman that the time was imminent when true worshippers would worship God in "*spirit and in truth*," not in spirit or truth. (John 4:23-24) Later in John's gospel Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the "*Spirit of truth*," not as the spirit of good intentions or misguided sincerity. (John 14:17, 16:13) Sadly in our day far too many professing believers imitate Pilate who will ask Jesus the bold question, "*What is truth?*" (John 18:38) But, like Pilate, they quickly run from His presence before He can answer their question. And they wonder why they can never find satisfaction with their beliefs. When we run from Jesus instead of lingering for His teaching, we settle for our own opinion, not for His truth. These misguided souls will use Scripture as a thin veil over their private opinions, but they go to Scripture with their minds already made up and use Scripture—"...wrest the scriptures to their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:16) They do not draw their beliefs from Scripture; they impose their private opinions onto Scripture and often in the process deceive even themselves into thinking they have the right interpretation of the Scriptures. A seventy-five year old believer may allow himself to be consumed with novice pride, make his ministry all about himself and his opinions, and be no less the unlearned novice than he was the first time he spoke to the church. Their ideas in fact are not compatible with Scripture at all, they often blatantly contradict the Scriptures, but they deceive even themselves into thinking that they know more about Scripture than anyone else.

Paul draws an immovable line for truth in this passage. Anyone who presents himself as a spiritual person, a believer in Jesus, must acknowledge that Paul's words are the Lord's "**commandments**." Many folks who strive to gain a reputation as some kind of spiritual authority invest

much of their time and effort in contradicting Paul's writings rather than acknowledging them as the Lord's firm commandments. Or in some misguided sense of being peaceably "Ecumenical," they ignore Paul's words and acknowledge that everyone can believe what he wishes, and all their beliefs are equally acceptable. Current examples of this "Anything goes" idea are.

1. Eschatology. One of the various "A-millennial" views, historical millennialism, or full dispensationalism. How often do you hear or observe pastors avoiding this topic altogether or saying that wise men disagree, so any view is acceptable? After teaching a very clear lesson on the Second Coming, Paul closes his teaching with the firm admonition to believers to be "**stedfast**" and "**unmovable**," not to compromise their teaching and accept any populist idea. (1 Corinthians 15:58)
2. Predestination. Here some will teach that God causatively predestinated all things that occur, but they will try to side-step the obvious and inevitable conclusion of this belief that makes God the predestinating cause of sin, holding the same belief that Paul repudiates in Romans 3:1-8 and writes that those who hold to this view slander both him and the sound doctrine that he taught. Another person will hold to the right Biblical teaching that God predestinated His chosen people (Romans 8:29-30, all "**whom**" not a single "what") to be raised from the dead at the Second Coming in His righteous, holy, and glorified image. And the pacifists will hold his nose and try to embrace these and other views as well.
3. Some folks who claim to believe in grace will teach that God uses human instruments to effect the new birth, but, say they, since God effectually and irresistibly ordained that all the elect would be born again, their human instrumentality view doesn't really differ significantly from the Biblical view of direct, immediate regeneration by the work of the Holy Spirit alone. So, say they, we should all circle the campfire and sing all verses of "Kumbaya" and pretend that everything is great.

Paul's steadfast requirement, "...let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the **commandments** of the Lord," falls on deaf ears in this relativistic New Age culture of believe anything you wish so long as you sincerely believe it.

In fact our study passage raises two bars or filters to truth, not one. First, Paul questions what happened to the word of God while in the Corinthians' custody. Under their care, did the word of God remain passively and invisible with them, or did it proceed out from them to others? However true, stewardship that fails to share the word of truth is deficient stewardship. It fails Paul's first test or filter of acceptable truth and godly conduct.

Secondly, we confront Paul's "...let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the **commandments** of the Lord." In an age of compromise and ecumenical harmony regardless of how divergent one's beliefs, Paul's words are seldom acknowledged, much less practiced.

As I accept *Jesus'* words that true worship must qualify as both "spirit" and "truth," I equally hold that faithful Christian service requires both Biblical evangelism and compliance with the uncompromised truth of Paul's, and other New Testament writings. Failure in either area constitutes failure to comply with New Testament "truth."

What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? The "Work" of evangelism belongs to every member of a New Testament church, not exclusively to the ministry. He is one person; the church consists of many. If each member of a local church rationalizes not saying anything to anyone about his faith, how will their friends, family, and work associates know anything about their faith? They won't! The word went to them, but they didn't send it forth to the people around them in their lives. The excuses abound for avoiding conversations about one's faith that might encourage someone to attend church and hear more. "My church is too far to drive. They want to attend a church less than 30 minutes from their home." "Our church might be too conservative for them." If a person loves the Lord and is hungry for sound spiritual food, all of these excuses are groundless. Do we believe what Scripture teaches about the gospel being empowered by the Holy Spirit so as to overcome just such obstacles? If so, we have no excuse to offer. We need to talk to them about our faith. So what if every person we talk to or invite to church doesn't believe or catch it? Did every seed sown (*Jesus'* parable of the sower and the seed) in *Jesus'* own teaching fall into fertile ground and produce a bumper crop? No, not even close. But in *Jesus'* lesson the sower doesn't avoid sowing because some of the seed might not produce fruit. He sows. That is his job! Further, that is your job. Are you doing it? Are you sowing healthy, sound gospel seed in your life? Has the word of God settled in your heart and turned

passive, or have you sent it on to others with your good, humble, godly life as an added witness to it?

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. Often I hear believers in a church sincerely ponder, "What is my spiritual gift? I'm not sure I even have one." Start by seeking sound true knowledge of God's truth from Scripture and from godly men and women in the faith and in the church. Never neglect the Biblical truth that the Lord's church is the "...pillar and ground of the truth." A prideful know-it-all is not the righteous custodian of God's truth. When Scripture teaches one thing and an individual believer, however sincerely, believes something different, believe Scripture and reject anything that anyone says that contradicts the right, sound interpretation of Scripture. If a person regularly advocates unsound private opinions instead of repeating sound rightly divided truths from Scripture, that person, according to Paul's words here, is not a prophet or even spiritual. He bears no evidence of having a spiritual gift, so he cannot help you or the Lord's church to grow stronger in the faith.

But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. Paul does not intend her to justify or to encourage ignorance. He is setting forth the truth that he has just taught in a clear binary (Either/or) form. If a man acknowledges that the words of Paul's writings, along with inspired Scripture in toto, are the commandments of the Lord, he has a spiritual gift, and he is on the road to wisdom and truth. If he denies that Paul's writings are the commandments of the Lord and advocates his own private interpretations, no matter his fluent diction, his memorization of and ability to quote Scripture, Paul imposes the binary consequences of his own rebellion and sin onto him and labels him as ignorant, not enlightened. We may grow from ignorance to light and knowledge, but we do so in harmony with Scripture and with the church, not on our own private path that always leads to growing confusion and pride-filled ignorance.

Paul writes that some who profess to faith are "*willfully ignorant.*" (2 Peter 3:5) They have all the pieces of the puzzle, but they refuse to follow the clearly laid out directions to put the pieces together so that they tell the story that the Lord intended for them to teach. They often can't figure out where to put a particular piece, so they simply set it aside and forget it. Or they try to force a piece into the wrong spot of the puzzle where it doesn't fit properly or contribute to the harmony of the story the Lord intended to teach by the puzzle.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor