

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Ezra: Encouraging God's People Unto Spiritual Renewal
X. Keeping God's Messengers Upright
(Ezra 10:16-44 et al.)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Many pastors and teachers in Christendom have failed to remain upright:

(1) We have long taught that salvation is through Christ alone, but the late Presbyterian pastor "Norman Vincent Peale" once testified on the Phil Donahue TV show, "I know a Shinto temple in Japan where I found eternal peace one day in my soul." (Dave Hunt & T. A. McMahon, The Seduction of Christianity, 1985, p. 152)

(2) We have long taught that we must be saved from sin and hell, but the late "Dr. Robert Schuller" told a large group of Unity ministers and ministers-in-training, "I talk a great deal to . . . Fundamentalists who deal constantly with words like sin, salvation, repentance, guilt, that sort of thing. So when I'm dealing with these people . . . what we have to do is positivize words that have classically only had a negative interpretation," Ibid., p. 152-153.

(3) We have long taught that Scripture is verbally God inspired, but the late pastor and civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "did not . . . believe that the story of Jonah being swallowed by a whale was true" or "that John the Baptist actually met Jesus, and he doubted the virgin birth of Christ . . . [Dr.] King" also "once referred to the Bible as 'mythological.'" (Matthai Chakko Kuruvila, "Writings Show King as a Liberal Christian, Rejecting Literalism," San Francisco Gate, January 15, 2007 as cited in Brannon S. Howse, Marxianity, 2018, p. 202-203)

(4) We have long taught the premillennial view of Bible prophecy, that the world will turn ever more evil until Christ returns to set up His Kingdom, but evangelical leader David Platte has promoted Michael O. Emerson and David Christian Smith's book, Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and The Problem Of Race In America, 2001 that claims the premillennialism of white Protestants make them racists! (Brannon S. Howse, Marxianity, 2018, p. 76, 190-192) The book claims, "Progressives view humans as essentially good, providing they are released from social arrangements that prevent people from living happily, productively and equally" while "(w)hite conservative Protestants are accountable freewill individualists" who "(u)nlike progressives . . . are individually accountable for their own actions" (Ibid., p. 76). White Protestants then "view the present world" as "evil and will inevitably suffer moral decline until Christ comes again. So" for them "to devote one's self to social reform is futile" (Ibid., p. 191), leaving white Protestant premillennialists unmotivated to address social issues like racism. (Ibid., p. 190)

(5) We have long taught that God's prophets communicated truth without error, but evangelical Professor Wayne Grudem claims "the words God speaks" by today's alleged Christian prophets "are no longer His very words, inerrant and authoritative." (R. Fowler White, "Does God Speak Today Apart From The Bible?", John H. Armstrong, gen. ed., The Coming Evangelical Crisis, 1996, p. 83) "Grudem's chief support for prophecy" as "a source of *fallible practical guidance* comes from two texts: 1 Corinthians 14:29 and 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22," Ibid. Professor Grudem claims that Paul taught us "to sort out the true and false elements *in any particular prophecy*," that prophecies spoken in today's church may contain some error that needs to be sorted out from the truth! (Ibid., p. 84)

(6) We have long taught that Scripture is sufficient for all ministry, but "(m)any conservative Protestants . . . do not believe in the sufficiency of Scripture for the cure of souls," so they integrate "secular psychological systems into Christianity." (Daniel Powlison, "How Shall We Cure Troubled Souls?" in John H. Armstrong, Ibid., p. 209)

(7) We have long taught that God is a loving, sovereign Lord, but evangelical theologians "Richard Rice and Clark Pinnock . . . see . . . an impossible contradiction between any affirmation of God's sovereign foreordination and an affirmation of man's true freedom . . . [what] strangely echoes the concern" behind "modern atheism . . ." (Robert B. Strimple, "What Does God Know?" in John H. Armstrong, Ibid., p. 142) So, the Calvinist view that God sovereignly chose in eternity past who would trust in Christ has so upset theologians that (a) some like Rice and Pinnock have become Arminians, denying God's full sovereignty (b) while others claim, "God does not exist," Ibid.

(8) We have long taught that believers are to live righteously, but the story, "Law firm details sexual misconduct by ministry leader" (Republican-American, January 12, 2021, p. 9A) reported, "Ravi Zacharias, who died in May after a high-profile career leading a global Christian ministry, engaged in sexual misconduct with massage therapists and carried on many amorous extramarital relationships via text message and email according to" an "in-depth report from" the Atlanta-based "law firm" Miller & Martin that was "hired by the [Ravi Zacharias] ministry."

Need: So, we ask, "Why have so many pastors and teachers not remained upright, and what is the solution?!"

I. In Ezra's day, some of the priests God had assigned to teach Scripture had greatly violated it:

- A. When Israel's governor Ezra sought to address the nation's severe sin of marrying pagan women, some of the priests were found to have committed this sin in grave violation of Deuteronomy 7:3-4. (Ezra 10:16-18)
- B. This was a shocking sin, for God called the priests to be expert messengers of His Word, Jer. 2:8, Malachi 2:7.
- II. The cause for the priests' sin rose from their failure to pay attention to the Scriptures they were to teach:**
 - A. According to Deuteronomy 17:18-20, Israel's kings were to **read daily** from their **own copies** of Scripture, which **practice** would **cause** them to revere the Lord and thus heed His Word precisely for God's blessing.
 - B. Similarly, Paul urged Timothy to pay attention to Scripture and its application in his life and ministry to keep first himself and then those who heard him from turning apostate, 1 Timothy 4:1, 13-16; 2 Timothy 3:15-4:5.
 - C. Thus, the priests who sinfully married pagan women did so from failing to pay attention to Scripture, what is verified by contrasting Ezra with these priests: unlike these priests, Ezra was appalled at hearing of their sin (Ezra 9:1-3, 5-15; 10:1a), for his devotion to God's Word had given him an intolerance for sin. (Ezra 7:6a, 10)

Lesson: *By ceasing to pay attention to Scripture, some of the priests, who were to be God's messengers of His Word, greatly sinned, but by paying attention to Scripture, Ezra stayed righteous and useful as God's messenger.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) May we messengers of God stay focused on His Word to stay useful for Him. (3) May we who hear God's messengers urge them to stay focused on Scripture for the good of all.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

Paying attention to Scripture addresses the problems we mentioned in our sermon introduction (as follows):

(1) On Norman Vincent Peale's claim that he found eternal peace for his soul in a Shinto temple, Acts 4:10-12 with 1 John 5:11-12 claim that salvation and eternal life are obtained only by faith in Jesus Christ.

(2) On Dr. Robert Schuller's claim that we must "positivize" our theology, Romans 3:19-28 asserts the negatives that all have sinned and are guilty before God, but that deliverance from God's wrath is by faith in Christ.

(3) On Dr. Martin Luther, Jr.'s denial of Scripture's divine inspiration, 2 Timothy 3:16 claims that all Scripture is God inspired, and Matthew 5:18 shows this means that the Bible is without error down to the smallest letter ("jot") and parts of each letter ("tittle") that affect the literal interpretation of its autograph manuscripts. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Matt. 5:18) John the Baptist met Jesus in John 1:36, Jesus in Matthew 12:39-40 said Jonah was in the belly of a great fish for 3 days and nights and Matthew 1:18-25 shows Jesus was born of a virgin!

(4) On Emerson and Smith's book, (a) Revelation 4:1 with 19:11-20:6 present the premillennial view of prophecy and (b) Galatians 3:28 opposes racism, teaching that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek. (c) Regarding progressive ideology, Ezekiel 18:1-32 reveals that individuals are responsible before God for their own sins.

(5) On Professor Grudem's claim about 1 Corinthians 14:29 and 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22, Paul there did **not** direct believers to sort true from false **elements** in **any one prophecy**, but to sort true from false **prophecies** among the **many prophecies** his readers might hear! (Ibid., White) Also, Deuteronomy 18:22 claims that **any error** by a prophet makes him a **false** prophet, so **true** prophets in the Early Church had to align **perfectly** with "the body of truth already revealed," what today constitutes canonical Scripture, Romans 12:6b. (Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to Romans 12:6)

(6) On the denial by many Protestants of the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling, 2 Timothy 3:17-4:2 claims Scripture fully equips the man of God for every good work, including counseling, until Christ's return!

(7) On the tension that Richard Rice and Clark Pinnock see in an alleged conflict between God's and man's wills in divine election and predestination, (a) Scripture does **not** teach that God chose who would believe in Christ, but that God foreknew from eternity past who would believe in Christ of their own will, and that God chose those He thus foreknew (i) unto a holy walk (1 Pet. 1:1-2), (ii) unto the rapture (2 Thessalonians 2:1-14) and (iii) unto holiness and blamelessness in heaven after the rapture and the judgment seat of Christ. (Eph. 1:3-4; 1 Cor. 3:13-15; 2 Cor. 5:10) (b) Also, regarding atheism, Psalm 14:1 reveals that it is foolish to deny God's existence!

(8) On Ravi Zacharias' failure to live uprightly, though he was philosophically skilled in defending the Christian faith, he failed to give spiritual nurture to his own soul. This is a danger especially for Christian scholars: many of them engage the world philosophically to evangelize unsaved scholars only to fall into spiritual failure themselves for being so focused on vain human philosophy that they neglect to rely on the Holy Spirit and Scripture to nurture their own souls. The solution is to heed Paul's call in 1 Timothy 4:13-16 to pay heed to Scripture.

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. May we messengers of God keep immersed in Bible study and application, and may we hearers encourage God's messengers to stay focused on studying and heeding Scripture for their benefit and for ours.