

Making a Case for Theology

By Bruce Moylan

1 Corinthians 1:10

I appeal to you my brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there many be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Many Christians want nothing to do with theology. “Practical application” is the watchword for today. Why is it that theological discussions are perceived as not important? Most Christians think that theology makes no difference in their lives, or the lives of anyone else. Can this be shown to be true? Is theology only for those who are placed in the ivory towers of our seminaries and bible colleges, or should it be a vital part of every Christian’s repertoire?

Theology as defined by Websters’ dictionary as:

1. Rational interpretation of religious faith, practice and experience.
2. The analysis, application and presentation of the traditional doctrines of religion.
3. The study of God and his relation to man and the world.
4. The interpretation of religious beliefs in relation to contemporary thought and life.

Upon reading the definition of theology, it is hard to imagine why so many people think that it is unimportant. Definition (1) states that theology is how we come to define and understand our faith how it applies to our daily experiences. It is “rational”, and therefore illogical concepts should not be found in theology. Theology that contains “unexplainable mysteries” is not sound theological ground. Definition (2) tells us that theology is how we present the Gospel to the lost world, and how we explain the deep things of God to fellow believers. It also shows the believer how to truly apply his beliefs about God in his everyday walk. Definition (3) shows that theology is concerned about understanding how God and man relate to one another, and how God governs his creation. And finally, definition (4) says that theology is how we harmonize our religious faith with our everyday surroundings and experiences.

Can a case be made for the marginalization of theology in everyday Christian life? I feel that the problem is multifaceted. First, most Christians think that a discussion about theological issues is only an excuse to start an argument. Secondly, if they engage in such an endeavor, the end result will be that both people still disagree but now they don't like each other anymore. And thirdly, development of our own personal theological position requires much time, study and perseverance.

It is understandable that one will not undertake a long and arduous journey unless a clear and desirable goal can be obtained. If theological pursuits are indeed difficult, what is the payoff? If this case cannot be made, then it is obvious why most Christians refuse to delve deeply into God's Holy Word to search for great insights and meaning.

First, it must be understood that everyone has theological beliefs, both Christians and non-Christians. Basically, what you think God is like, how he relates to man, what will happen to you when you die, and what is right and wrong, all depend on your theological beliefs. Christians obtain most of their theology through the Sunday morning service. Reading the Bible serves mainly to reinforce what they heard and already believe is true. Rarely does a Christian read the Bible to determine if what the preacher said was correct or even consistent with the Word of God. This is how vast numbers of people are led astray, and is the basis upon which many church splits have been founded. A Presbyterian minister once told me that there were more than thirty sub-groups of Presbyterians. If the church has been so fragmented due to theology, then it is no small wonder why Christians today are reluctant to even discuss the topic. Many fear that if we persist too long, we will have yet another denomination claiming that their way is right. I think that the case can be made that most Christians are tired of the non-righteous behavior that is manifested when theological discussions begin. Coupled to this is the attitude that "great" men of God have already looked at all of these issues, and if they cannot figure it out, how can we?

Non-Christians however get their theology from Christians. They will not search the Scriptures for truth, they assume that the Christians have already done their homework. They simply believe that what we say about God must accurately describe the Christian God. They will not read the Bible to determine if what we say about God can be rigorously defended in the Scriptures. If they perceive a fundamental flaw in our concepts of God, the God of the Bible will be rejected on these grounds. It is therefore fundamentally important, therefore, that the god we claim to follow and know, is in all aspects the God of the Bible. The concept that God has predestined most people from the foundations of the world to spend eternity in Hell is a concept that most non-believers have a difficult time accepting. If this is in fact not true, then these people are being lead head long into Hell's eternal flames by our theology. Make no mistake, if our incorrect theology aids in the damnation of God's children, God will hold us accountable.

A primary focus of the Christian church today is unity in the body of Christ. Many want to lay aside their theological differences and simply “work together”. Clearly, disharmony and infighting cannot possibly serve any useful end. People think that if we could all just “get along” then the body of Christ could really make a difference in the world. It seems so obvious, overlook our differences and work hand in hand with our fellow brothers. It is in this arena that striving for theological “perfection” is looked on as less than helpful.

Many Christians like to boil theology into two areas:

- 1) Does the point that you are trying to make directly effect peoples salvation.
- 2) All others.

If you can show how the point directly effects a person’s “salvation” then they will listen. If your point is perceived to fall into area two, then they do not have the time, energy or proclivity to entertain your point. You are lost in the minutiae of Scripture, talking about debatable points, and could cause dissension among the brethren. This is to be avoided.

On the surface, one would be hard pressed to not agree with the above position. However, this does not necessarily mean that it is correct. I do not think that anyone would disagree that the most powerful Church would be every Christian believing only that which was Biblically correct, hearing from the Spirit of God, and walking in lock step against the gates of Hell. This is not to say that all people should do the same thing, but it is to say that we must have a coordinated attack plan. This plan can only come from the Father. Clearly, with so much doctrine in dispute among all of the churches, someone must believe something that is not correct. Basically, we might disagree about who is correct, but each one of us knows that someone, somewhere is wrong. We can be assured that this error was not started at the Throne of God. Or, to put it differently, someone is not listening to God, because if they were, God would give them light.

If someone is not listening to God, can they be effectively used in his service? This would be like sending a soldier into battle and not telling him who was the enemy, or where he could find the battle. This condition will lead to Christians spending large amounts of time fighting something that is not our enemy. This is similar to fighting the symptoms of a disease instead of the cause of the disease.

Can a case be made that the belief of falsehoods, lies, and distortions, is unimportant? Can God use people who cannot hear, or do not want to hear the Spirit concerning God’s character or how God functions in this world? Are we more interested about “winning souls” than knowing, loving, and following God? To say that all theology outside of clear salvation issues is truly unimportant is to say that all other points about God are

inconsequential. If these concepts were important, however; then the person who had an incorrect perception of any aspect of God, would not be as effective as one who did not suffer this condition. Therefore, does our effectiveness as a Christian depend on what we believe? A greater point is: Does our salvation depend on what we believe”?

Can Incorrect Doctrine Affect Our Standing Before God?

II Peter 3:17

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.

What is the apostle Peter trying to say? It appears that he is warning Christians that there are people that can influence you in such a way that you fall from grace. We are to be on guard that this does not happen. The question is: how will these “lawless” men influence the Christian? It is from without, or within the church door?

II Peter 2:1-2

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them - bringing destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

Here the apostle Peter specifically states that there will be false teachers in the church. These teachers will secretly introduce DESTRUCTIVE heresies. These concepts can do damage! He then says that they will bring destruction upon themselves, and that MANY Christians will follow them. Does this mean that the Christians “lose” their salvation? Well if the false teachers bring destruction upon themselves by doing certain things, will not others who follow their example? The net result of this is that Christianity will fall into disrepute. Is there a Christian alive that doesn’t know this to be true condition of today’s church?

Matthew 24:10-11

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

Again we see that in the end times, Christian believers will fall away from Jesus and that false prophets will appear and deceive MANY people. Are we on the look out for false teachers, preachers, prophets, evangelists, and apostles today? Are we told by our leadership to be on watch? False teachings were being introduced in the first century

church with the apostles in the “next town”. Do we believe that no Christian doctrine has been distorted in the last 2,000 years? With so much doctrine in dispute, can anyone make the case that “heresies” have not been brought in and institutionalized in our mainline denominations? If Satan has spent so much time perverting the Gospel, even from its inception, do we not understand that Satan considers doctrine important?

Hebrews 13:9

Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.

Where are we going to be carried? What constitutes a strange teaching?

I Timothy 4:16

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Paul instructs Timothy that if he continues to watch his life and doctrine, in the end he will save himself, and also bring others to a life changing experience with our Savior Jesus Christ. Here we see that our “walk” and “talk” are both salvation issues. Timothy was to watch his doctrine so that the message was not diluted or polluted in any way. If it were, he was in danger of losing his own salvation and he would at least hinder, if not severely damage, the evangelism of the world. A high price indeed for lack of diligence. With this important link between doctrine and evangelism, would you think that Satan might be interested in a little doctrinal perversion?

I Timothy 6:20

Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith.

Again, Christians have wandered from the faith because of belief in “opposing ideas”. What we think, believe, and meditate on is crucial.

Colossians 1:28

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom. So that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

You cannot attain perfection in Christ apart from all wisdom. Any impurities in our knowledge will “stunt” our spiritual growth. We cannot have wisdom apart from truth. Therefore, if we believe the lies of Satan, we cannot attain what God has so richly given us.

II Timothy 2:17-18

Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.

There were false teachers in the church that spread a teaching that was not of Christ. This teaching appears to have spread quite rapidly and had gained acceptance. The term gangrene is quite descriptive of the condition and the severity of this doctrine. This teaching was able to “destroy” the faith of some Christians. Therefore, teachings about the resurrection is a salvation issue. I think that most people today would not have placed this teaching in that light.

Titus 1:11

They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach -

What is meant by ruining? Clearly, Paul taught that these “brothers” needed to be silenced because they were reeking destruction in the lives of the Believers. Whole households were being lead astray. If false doctrines were a problem in the first century church, then why do many Christians think that it is not important now?

I Thessalonians 3:5b

I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.

Galatians 4:11

I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

II Corinthians 6:1

As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.

These verses are just a few that show that the Apostle Paul was concerned that incorrect teachings were corrupting the saints to such a degree as to negate his work among them. There are multiple verses that warn the Christian not to be deceived. If what we believe is not as important as “who we know”, then why the emphasis on staying with only the apostles’ doctrine?

I Corinthians 3:10b

But each one should be careful how he builds.

Who is doing the building? We are! You are the construction manager of your own house and are also responsible for aiding the building of those in the unsaved world. Be careful how you build. If you build correctly, your works will endure, but if you build foolishly, you will suffer loss.

Colossians 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

What happens to you if someone takes you captive? Are you in control of your actions, or must you go where others lead? If you are taken captive, will this affect your ability to do God's work? If it doesn't, then why does Paul care?

II Thessalonians 2:15

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

Why stand firm? Is it important? Is it a salvation issue?

These verses are just a few of the many Scriptural passages that show that what we believe is vitally important.

Is Satan Sending His Emissaries To Deceive the Church?

Galatians 1:6-9

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned. As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Paul is quite emphatic about his doctrine. If anyone perverted it in any way, he was in danger of being eternally condemned. Obviously, the people Paul was referencing were in the church. The attack was from the inside. Any gospel, except the one that was EXACTLY what the apostles preached, is not Gospel at ALL.

II Corinthians 11:3-4

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

Here we see that the “church” seemed quite willing to accept any teaching that came along. No one seemed to put up much of a fight. Is the modern day church any different? These teachings hampered the person’s ability to sincerely devote themselves to Christ. If this happens, what happens to the person’s relationship with the Lord, and their ability to walk as Jesus walked? What happens to their ability to perform miracles through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit?

Galatians 2:4

This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.

Slaves to whom? False brothers? Do these things happen today, or has Satan stopped sending false teachings, people, and doctrines into our modern day church? Satan did not waste his time sending false brothers into the church so that there would be less food for the saints at the church fellowship dinner.

II Thessalonians 3:6

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.

Now the apostle Paul is getting “divisive”. If someone calls themselves a Christian, and does not live according to the “teaching” that they received from him, we are to keep away from, and not associate with that person. Today, this teaching would be labeled as less than helpful in our desire to garner large numbers of Christians together so that we can have big meetings. We are told that as long as a person “believes” certain things, then they are a brother and sister in Christ, and that we shouldn’t judge. Is this position scripturally supportable?

Romans 16:17-18

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people.

Can another word for division be “church split”? Who are these people that the apostles keep referencing. Paul is championing a strict adherence to the letter of the Gospel that was preached. Here again we see that there will be people among the brethren that are not of God. They will walk among us only to serve themselves, trying to actively deceive

God's elect. We also must ask ourselves, "Who are the naïve people that Paul references", and "Could we be one of them"?

I John 4:1

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Things are not always as they seem. Satan has not stopped sending us his evil spirits disguised as angles of light. If you cannot discern which spirit is of God and which is from Satan, you will eventually be deceived.

Galatians 5:10-12

I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view, The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

Paul's reply seems quite emphatic and graphic.

II Corinthians 2:17

Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit.

Conversely, there are those that do. Do you know how to identify them?

II Corinthians 11:13

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.

Here is a reference to false apostles. Basically, Satan will counterfeit all five of the ministries of the Church. Why are these men doing these things if they are not important?

Jude 4

For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you.

The enemy is in our midst! They are on a "covert" mission from Satan.

II John 10

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

As a warning, the apostle John says that anyone who teaches a different gospel is wicked, and the Christian is to have nothing to do with that person. If we do, we are guilty of spreading their wicked work. Notice that this warning specifically references those that teach. With this admonition, if we embrace all Christian denominations without regard to their specific gospel message, can we be in fact bringing God's wrath upon ourselves? This is not to say that we do not fellowship with other believers. These warnings are always directed at the people who bring the message, not the ones deceived by it. We must never give up on our fellow brethren, but lovingly instruct them in the true Gospel.

How Are We As Christians Able to Discern Truth?

The next two sections address issues in such a way that some may question the role of our teachers, and pastors. Let no one mistake, or minimize the vital role that these individuals play in our daily lives and spiritual development. God has ordained the five-fold ministry, and nothing in this paper is meant to demean this ministry.

II Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Scripture is our standard. Nothing that is contrary to a single passage can be truth. Improper use of Scripture will leave us ill equipped to do God's work.

II Timothy 4:2

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. For a time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Are we now in a time when men will not put up with sound doctrine? Is this witnessed when we try to harmonize any of the various theological dichotomies and people want no part? Is this observed if you question the basis for an "accepted" Biblical principle? We must also observe that this Scriptural passage references "great numbers" of false teachers. Does this fit with our observations of the current church?

Titus 1:9

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

We must? What happens if we do not hold firmly? We will be ill equipped to instruct, encourage and refute those who are opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Apostle Paul obviously thought that it was paramount to propagate an undiluted message.

Titus 2:1

You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.

Again we see the word “must”. Why is this so imperative? It should be noticed that nowhere is it mentioned that this doctrine only concerns “salvation” or any other issues. The teachings of Christ are an indivisible set. We cannot “pick” which topics are important, and which are not. God did not put fluff in His Word. Everything is important. To ignore this is indeed dangerous.

Specifically, what are the exact points of doctrine that are important, and which ones that are “debatable”? The gospel message is always referenced as a “package deal” that cannot be subdivided. If we in fact subdivide the Gospel message into important and unimportant sections, by what basis do we do this? Is this an eternally dangerous undertaking? Without clear Biblical instruction, we do this at our own risk.

Were the Apostles only concerned about “salvation” issues, not minding what else was preached? Paul considered the teachings of repentance from dead works as elementary (Hebrews 6:1). These issues were the basics, Paul was eager to teach “meat” not “milk”. His frustration is clear in the language of Hebrews 6, Paul was chastising the people for slow growth. Upon reading the above verses, it is hard to imagine Paul saying that we just need to forget our differences and just get along.

Acts 17:11

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

This verse sums up what I am attempting to say. Trust but verify! If the Bereans did not trust the apostle Paul without verification, should you trust your pastor or denomination? If you blindly accept doctrine without research, you are in peril of losing your secure position in Christ.

These points lead us to the conclusion that many will be led astray by false teachers. While this point should not be overlooked, the most important question for believers is: With the hundreds of “Christian” denominations in the world, who is right, or more specifically, is anyone right? We must ask ourselves, How complete has the deception been?

This brings us to the point about how we are to understand the thoughts and ways of our Father. We are not to rely on men, we are to be taught of God. We are not to simply accept what our preachers and teachers tell us. If we do, we are ready to be deceived and dragged away. This does not mean that our preachers and teachers cannot give us points to ponder, or fill in some small detail, but our theology must be that, OURS. It is a dangerous proposition to borrow someone else's concept of God. You may be "borrowing" a concept from one of the false teachers!

Who Teaches Christians the Truth?

I John 2:27

As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit - just as he has taught you, remain in him.

Do we need someone to teach us and show us the way? If we do, then the apostle John was wrong. It is the Holy Spirit that teaches us about ALL THINGS. What else is there left for the preachers to do? Just like a prophesy should not be taken as direction, it should only be used as confirmation, likewise a sermon should only confirm what you have already heard from the Spirit.

John 16:13

But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

The Spirit of truth started his ministry on Earth on the day of Pentecost and has not left. He will guide you and tell you the things of the Father.

John 8:47

He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.

This verse is quite clear. God will talk to you, and you will be able to hear Him if you in fact belong to Him. If God is talking to you, then what is He saying? If in fact you have a question about something, ask God, not man. If you cannot/do not hear from God, you may need to consider the second part of the verse. This is not meant in anyway as a slur or condemnation. But God's word is plain. If we find that we have been deceived or are not in the place that we should be, the Father is willing to instruct us and to forgive us. Jesus died to redeem us from sin, so that we could have a personal relationship with the Father. As important as preachers and teachers are, God is more important!

James 1:5

*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask **GOD**, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*

If we do not understand something, a Christian is to ask God. Nowhere in the Scriptures does it say or even allude to the fact that if we cannot understand God's message, we are to ask the pastor for guidance. This does not mean that the pastor cannot give you the truth, but how will you know if he does? We must verify everything that man tells us. As Ronald Regan once said, "Trust but Verify". This should be the Christian's slogan.

Philippians 3:15

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.

If our concept of something differs from the truth, God will make it clear to us. This however requires the one in error to be able and willing to hear from the Holy Spirit. Because clearly incompatible doctrines have coexisted for hundreds of years, it is obvious that someone isn't listening. Those who are incorrect are refusing to hear God's correction. Would you think that these people are useful for doing Kingdom work?

Colossians 1:9

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

God is responsible for being our teacher. If you aren't attending his class, how will you receive a passing grade? Notice that from the moment Paul was aware of these brethren, he prayed for knowledge that will be obtained through ALL wisdom and understanding. If your understanding is clouded, your knowledge of God will be also.

John 6:45-46

It is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught of God". Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.

We must hear the Father in order to be saved. Without hearing from God, it is impossible to find salvation. Again, who does the teaching?

John 15:15b

for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

This passage highlights that fact that Jesus learned about the Father from the Father. Also, Jesus states that everything that he learned he made known to the apostles. Therefore, all of the apostles learned one and only one doctrine. Their knowledge was not subject to interpretational errors. How is it that we have developed so many doctrines? These “other” doctrines could not have come from the apostles and therefore were not originated by Jesus through the instruction of the Father.

No one can deny that there were false teachers and preachers in the first century church. Also, it is undeniable that the apostles spent a good amount of time both coming against these teachings, and warning the people not to be deceived. Has things changed? Are false teachers any less deceptive or lethal today? The Apostles record that in their day many false teachers had already infiltrated the Church and was deceiving and wrecking the faith of some of the elect. Is theology then not a salvation issue? These groups of deceivers included those who taught circumcision, and Greek wisdom.

What Does Scripture Say About Those Who Teach Error?

I Timothy 1:3-4

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work - which is by faith.

I Timothy 1: 6-7

Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.

I Timothy 6:3

If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing.

It should be obvious that there must be large numbers of our pastors, ministers, and priests that are teaching error. This point is not debatable. The only point that is debatable is who, if anyone is correct. Remember what Jesus said about the teachings of the Jewish leaders.

Matthew 16:6 and 12

Be careful, Jesus said to them, Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Being on guard requires activity. It is not passive. It doesn't just happen. If you fall asleep, you will wake up with a sword at your throat. False teaching has a way of slowly creeping into the entire mixture until it has permeated the entire loaf. Once leavening has been introduced, it cannot be removed. Bad theology is a cancer that destroys the body of Christ.

Is All of this Beyond The Understanding of the “Common” Man?

II Corinthians 1:13

For we do not write you anything that you cannot read or understand.

Paul states that everything that he has written was within the grasp of the first century church. These people were not especially educated. They were not Greek philosophers or Jewish scholars. These were ordinary people. Therefore, when people talk of “mysteries” and things that we “just cannot understand”, beware. The Gospel of Christ is simplicity itself. It is my personal belief that when the Church first instituted Bible colleges and seminaries, they had to have a curriculum that took at least four years to learn. When they created a doctorate degree, they now needed an eight-year course of study. And to top it off, to justify peoples expenditure of money and time, they needed to have a “good” job for them when they graduated. It therefore became imperative to convince the common man that all of this was needed and that they needed to fund it.

Although this is taking cynicism to an extreme, it does make a point. The apostles had no education to speak of. Yes, they were fluent in several languages, but that was commonly required for trade and was no special or rare ability for the time. If you feel like your pastor or minister is more capable on understanding the Word of God than you are, then you have been deceived.

To take a look at the people who made up the early church look at:

I Corinthians 1:26

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is not the concepts of God and the Gospel that are difficult, it is putting them into practice that requires much effort.

Paul also gives the common man one way to determine if what is being said is true.

I Corinthians 4:6b

so that you will learn from us the meaning of the saying, “DO not go beyond what is written.”

If people tell you that a scriptural passage means something totally different than what it appears to mean, question it. If the interpretation of the passage doesn't make “common sense”, then question it even more. The Bible was written by God to tell the common man about who he was, what he required, and what he was going to do. And finally, the people in the first century church were not “pew sitters”. They had an active faith.

Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (doctrine - King James) and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Are we as devoted? Notice that the first thing that they were devoted to was their doctrine. This is even listed before fellowship, eating and praying! If we as Christians know we are not to stop meeting together, praying and most of all eating, then why is our doctrine disposable. If we sacrifice our doctrine in order to obtain “common ground” with others who label themselves as Christians, do we not lose? Does not the entire Body of Christ lose?

Has Satan Only Perverted Christian Theology?

Satan has been busy at work perverting the world's concept of God from the very beginning. In the Garden of Eden, the problem started by not knowing exactly what God taught. In Genesis 2:17 God said:

But you must no eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.

When Satan questioned Eve about what God said, her reply was (Gen. 3:2-3)

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it or you will die.’ ”

This “misunderstanding” proved fatal for the world. Eve mistakenly thought that both touching and eating the fruit would cause death. Satan had to convince her that God lied. If God lied, then Eve would not believe the warning that God gave. He had to place the seed in her mind that God was holding something back. Satan knew that she could touch the fruit, but he was not about to correct her mistaken concept. Once Eve touched the fruit without consequence, she then figured that nothing bad would happen. A “small” addition to God's Word can prove fatal.

The O.T. Jews were also not immune to Satan's perversions. There were four major Jews sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and the Zealots). These groups were all functioning during the time of Jesus. They were mainly separated along theological lines. What did Jesus say about them?

John 3:10

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and you do not understand these things?"

John 9:41

Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."

Matthew 22:29

Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures of the power of God."

Matthew 23:13

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to."

The accepted religious leaders of the day were not going to heaven. Is this no longer the case? Was this only possible before the cross, or has at least some of it continues right up until this very day? Here we see that the religious leaders were not only going to Hell, they were also not allowing others to escape their fate. How were they doing this. Could it be my their teaching, instruction and observance of man made rituals?

Matthew 23:15

"Woe to you, teaches of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. Woe to you, blind guides!"

The convert is said to be twice the son of hell. This happened because he believed the doctrine and ways of the Pharisees and put them into practice. If we believe and act on false concepts of God, is this important, or will God excuse our activities? Being called "twice the son of hell" should serve as a stern warning for just believing the religious practices of the day. Remember, the teachers were considered by God to be blind.

Matthew 5:20

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Conclusion

We cannot relegate certain concepts of God as being unimportant. Any machine that has broken parts cannot function to its optimal designed capacity. Likewise, all Scripture is tied together to establish our working concept of God. While certain parts may not “kill” the machine entirely, they will reduce its capacity to function. What we believe is not without consequence.

This paper is not meant to disparage the multitude of godly men and women of Christ that have devoted their entire lives to the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. To these individuals, the Body of Christ owes a large debt of gratitude. It should also not be interpreted as a way in which to minimize the ministry of preaching and teaching the Gospel, for in fact these are crucial and indispensable in the Body. The five-fold ministry is given to us by the Holy Spirit. But this paper is to serve as a warning to the Body. If someone is a pastor, this means that he/she has been ordained by man. Ordinary lay people need to be able to spot those individuals that have not only been ordained by man, but also have been ordained by God. A godly pastor will aid in your walk with the Lord, a deceiver will endanger your very life.

The Word specifically warns us that Satan will send false angels of light, teachers, preachers, prophets, apostles, and lying signs and wonders. The ministry of these entities will be to destroy the Church. Anyone caught in this web of deceit will be destroyed. The Bible has been given to the Church so that by intense “personal” study of its contents, the individual can escape any plan of Satan. However, lack of diligence can prove fatal. Each one of us must ask ourselves, “Where do we fit into this picture of things?” If you are like many Christians who have been brought up in the Church and told from infancy what to believe, take heed. Do not trust your eternal security and rewards to what someone else has told you is the truth. Your fate is your responsibility. Hear the truth from the Holy Spirit. Hell is a terrible price to pay for lack of diligence. Can anything be more important?

Matthew 7:21-23

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven. MANY will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “ I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.”

Do you know what the will of the Father is, and are you doing it? Your eternal destiny depends on being correct. In paratrooper school you are taught to not let anyone else but yourself pack your own parachute. When things are important, it is better to trust yourself as opposed to the unknown abilities and motivations of others.

These people really believed that they were Christians. Undoubtedly, those who knew them probably also considered them to be Christians. They may even have believed and followed what these people were saying. All the while they were evil. Brothers and sisters in Christ, these people were so deceived that they were not even enlightened when face to face with Jesus. Jesus said that there were going to be MANY in this condition. This is only possible if your understanding of what makes a Christian is incorrect. Their theology had been perverted! Don't let this happen to you.