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SATISFIED WITH THE SCRIPTURES

BY GEOFF THOMAS

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Luke 16:19-31

“There was a certain **rich man**, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain **beggar named Lazarus**, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into **Abraham’s** bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

“And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that [would come] from thence.

“Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

*“And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses
and the prophets, neither will they be
persuaded, though one rose from
the dead.” —Luke 16:31*

Our Lord Jesus Christ told of two men: a rich man who rejected God and a beggar whose trust was in the Lord. Both of them died, and the beggar went to heaven while the rich man went to hell.

The Meaning of the Parable

One of the reasons why our Lord told this story of the rich man and Lazarus the beggar was that we might know something of what happens after death. Many will enjoy the pleasures of heaven, but others will suffer the horrors of hell. That is the conscious experience of all who die.

We all live in a room, and there are two exits. Over the one is written the word *heaven*, and over the other *hell*. There is no other door. There is no purgatory; there is no second chance after death; there is no soul-sleep; there is no limbo; there is no such thing as the annihilation of the soul. After death comes the judgment, and then there is heaven or hell. The Son of God is emphasizing here that souls do not die as bodies do, but after death the souls of men and women live on and are immediately, consciously, intelligently aware of the love of God or of His wrath.

Abraham

The rich man, who is suffering the torments of hell, holds a conversation with Abraham. It is with this patriarch in particular that he talks because Abraham is the father of all who believe (Rom 4:3). God had once spoken to Abraham and had given him great promises (Gen 15:1-5). He had pointed out the stars and said that He would so bless Abraham that his progeny would become as numerous as the lights of heaven. He would give Abraham a child in his old age; and through this child, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. This was because one day, in the line of Abraham's own son, a child would be born who would be Savior of the world.

Abraham had responded by believing all that God said (Gen 15:6). He left his house in Ur and set out with his family to this unknown place that God said He was preparing for him (Gen 12). In such trust, Abraham became a role model for all who similarly hear the Word of God, believe, and are justified. All have sinned and deserve the judgment of God forever, but the Lord has provided redemption through the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Rom 3:23; 5:8).

Heaven...

Believers in all the nations of the earth are blessed with the Gospel of salvation when they entrust themselves to the Son of God alone. All of these believers then come into the blessing of glory after death. Jesus said, “In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (Joh 14:2). To the dying thief who believed in Him He said, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luk 23:43). One day, He will say to those on His right hand, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat 25:34). This beggar, whom Jesus spoke of in the parable, was one of those who trusted in the Son of God.

...or hell

The same Savior Who spoke of heaven also warned the world of the awful truth of the place of woe. In unambiguous language, He spoke of the worm that does not die, the flames that are not quenched, the wailing and gnashing of teeth, the outer darkness, the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. The Lord Jesus taught that hell is real, is ruled by God, and involves rejection and pain. He said more about it than anyone else in the Bible.

If we are serious in our understanding of the Man Who preached the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 5-7); Who, when He addressed the waves and winds, was obeyed (Mar 4:41); Who healed every elderly incurable who in the last stages of his illness came to Him for life (Mat 4:24); Who even raised the dead (Mat 11:5; Luk 7:11-15; Joh 12:1), and was Himself resurrected (Mat 28:6)—then we must treat whatever He says with the utmost gravity. We must reckon with the fact that this man of integrity, patience, and love, said plainly that some people will spend eternity in hell. Although He said that this present life was important, it is not *all*-important.

An urgent warning

So the Lord Jesus told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and New Testament scholars can help us avoid distorting its meaning. Dr. Craig Blomberg, for example, argues that we should derive one point for each major character in a parable. He shows that this rule helps us understand Jesus' main points in many parables and keeps us on track.

The three main characters in the parable before us are Abraham, the rich man, and Lazarus.¹ Abraham is the spokesman for God. The rich man represents every unrepentant person. The name “Lazarus” means “God helps,” and so the poor beggar signifies those who have received the saving help of God.

The great theme of the parable is that of being “too late.” The rich man pays attention to Lazarus too late; he sees the unbridgeable chasm too late; he worries about his brothers too late; and he heeds the Law and the Prophets too late.

The Conversation with Abraham

The man in hell holds a conversation with Abraham. First, he requests that he might be relieved of his torment, which is unbearable. But Abraham tells him that this is impossible. He says in effect, “All your lifetime you received your good things. You were reminded of the certainty of death and judgment; you were warned to flee from the wrath to come; you were told of the mercy and longsuffering and grace of God; you were told to seek that mercy and find peace through the Gospel. After death, it is too late. Mercy is unattainable; death fixes the destinies of men and women for ever; and in hell they experience the justice of God, and will do so forever.” Some may think that is unfair, but only God is an adequate judge of what sin deserves.

The rich man’s condition, then, cannot change. There is no hope. A great gulf is fixed between those who are in hell and those who—because they entrusted themselves, their lives, and every detail of every day into the hands of a faithful Savior—are in the presence of Abraham. Those who are in hell cannot cross over that impassable gulf. There is no possibility of a change from one state to another. None whatsoever. Abraham tells the rich man that awful fact.

The second request by the man in hell concerns his five brothers. These brothers were still in the world, so the man in the pit thinks of a scheme by which they will not join him there, because their presence, no doubt, would make his hell five times worse. He devises a plan of evangelism—something many human beings do—imagining a way of delivering his siblings from this place of woe. The five brothers all knew the beggar who lived his life at the gate of their rich brother’s house. He had always been there; that had been his “patch.” And they all knew that he had died.

So the rich man says to Abraham, “Send that man, Lazarus, back to my brothers, to show himself to them as one raised from the dead. As a result of that, they will all become believers, especially when he tells them about hell. If a man should be raised from the dead and tell them what is happening to me, they will change. They will no longer curl their lips and say, ‘Nobody’s ever come back.’ They will believe in God and escape hell.”

That is the wisdom of the man in hell. That is his proposal. From that request, there arises a discussion between this man and Abraham. Abraham argues one side and the man in hell argues the other. Abraham is defending the position of those who believe in God through the Lord Jesus Christ, and the man in hell is defending the position of those who use human reason and never trust the Savior, either in this world or the next. This argument is going on still, and it is important for us to see what it consists of and to see the difference between the two approaches.

The Bible Alone

On one side is Abraham and all who believe as he did. One thing is true of every one of them, and that is that they are *satisfied with the Bible*. Theologically, we would say that they hold to the *sufficiency of the Scriptures* to save any person from hell. Thus, Abraham says, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them” (verse 29).

Moses and the Prophets

Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. The first book is *Genesis*, which tells us that God is a personal God, an almighty Lord. It tells us how He made the world and why the world is in the state it is. It speaks of the great answer to man’s rebellion in the Christ Who one day will come and bruise the serpent’s head. Then in *Exodus*, we are told of the Passover, of those for whom a lamb died as a substitute, and of how the angel of death passed over all of them. Because of the lamb that shed its blood, they were forgiven.

The book of *Leviticus* tells us “that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins” (Lev 17:11; Heb 9:22). It points to the sacrifices of redemption instituted by a loving God. The book of *Numbers* tells us of the bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness, and shows that if men obediently look on who and what that represents they will have life (Num 21:9). The book of *Deuteronomy* tells us of the covenant relationship between God and His people—Jehovah, the Great I AM, pledging Himself to be their God and Savior forever and ever (Deu 7:9; ch.29).

And not only Moses. “They have...the prophets,” Abraham says. The rich man’s brothers have all the rest of the Old Testament, written by the prophets, who together speak of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is there in it all. So Abraham says, “Let them listen to them.”

How much more should *we*, today, listen to those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ majesty, who were with Him in the upper room, who heard Him cry, “Peace, be still,” and saw the waves obey Him, and who helped unloose the grave clothes

¹ **Lazarus** – a different person from the brother of Martha and Mary whom Jesus actually raised from the dead in John chapter 11.

from the risen Lazarus! (1Jo 1:1; Mar 14:15-25; Mar 4:39; Joh 11:44). Should we not listen to those who were led by the Holy Spirit into all truth in what they wrote?

A choice

Do you see Abraham's argument? The Scriptures are enough to bring a person to faith in Jesus Christ. The Scriptures themselves are more than sufficient to save someone from hell. Then Abraham adds, in effect, "If they do not listen to the Bible, nothing else will convince them. Nothing else will do any good, not even the spectacle of a resurrection before their very eyes" (verse 31).

So the question is this: Do you agree with Abraham? On the one side of the debate, the man in hell is saying that it seems a great idea to send a man back from the grave to the world of the living to warn them. But Abraham says, "They have the Scriptures, let them listen to them."

The Bible Plus...

What the rich man says is that the Bible is not enough; his brothers need something more than the Bible if they are going to be saved from hell. He has no confidence in the Word of God. In his thinking, the Bible is an ineffective book; you cannot expect anyone to get serious about eternal life and flee from the wrath to come, simply by reading the Bible or by hearing sermons from the Scriptures.

Who is the rich man?

Now, it is very interesting that the man in hell addresses Abraham respectfully as "Father Abraham," and that the patriarch acknowledges that and responds to him with the word *son*. In other words, this man is a fellow Jew, a member of the Old Testament covenant people. He has been circumcised: ethnically and outwardly, he is a son of Abraham.

Thus, in this parable the Lord Jesus is speaking to fellow countrymen. He is addressing the Pharisees who were sneering at Him. Luke says, "The Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him" (v.14). They could not imagine that they themselves were in any danger of hell. Even when they saw Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, raised from the dead, they continued plotting to kill the Lord Jesus (Joh 11:53).

This rich man, then, grew up in the synagogue, memorizing the Scriptures and hearing them week by week. But he never obeyed them, nor did he love them, finding them boring. He never dreamed for a moment that he would end up in hell. He never thought that one day there would be a great chasm fixed between himself and Abraham. There are many like him, who hear the Word of God preached with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. Judas heard it; Ananias heard it; Sapphira heard it; Demas heard it; the Judaizers heard it—but all were lost (Mat 27:5; Act 5:5; 2Ti 4:10; 2Pe 2:1).

The rich man's excuses

Now, you see what the rich man is saying from hell: "If the Scriptures are the only thing that you are going to give my brothers, well...I had them, and what good did they do me? They didn't change me." In fact, he is saying in hell, deep within his heart, "It's perfectly understandable that I didn't believe, and that they don't believe. All we had was the Bible. I know my brothers; I'm aware how they live; I know where they're going. The Bible is not going to touch them. Those kinds of men need something more." In effect, he is saying, "It is excusable. If only I had seen a miracle that thrilled me, I would have believed. If a man had been raised from the dead and had spoken to me, then I would have paid attention. If I could have gone to a meeting where amazing things happened, it would have been different. But all I had was the Bible. The Bible!"

Giving the Bible a helping hand

That is what many people still say. "You don't expect the world to be attracted by the Bible, by preaching the Scriptures, by texts outside chapels, and verses on railway station hoardings,² and tracts with Scriptures on them, and injunctions to memorize the Bible, and lessons from the Bible to children in Sunday School, and camps where young people are taught the Bible, and conferences where the Bible is proclaimed. You don't expect people to be attracted by that? We need concerts! We need drama! We need costumes! We need bands! We need choreography! Bring in the drums and the synthesizers. Send for the clowns! Then the people will come. We need superstars and celebrities to give us their testimonies, not just the Bible alone!"

But, you see, Abraham was unyielding. He insists that the Bible is sufficient.

There are many religious people who argue like that man from hell. The Roman Catholic Church says that the Bible is not enough; we must have sacred tradition, too. The Quakers say that the Bible is not enough; there must be an "inner voice." Modernists say that Scripture itself is not enough; it must be interpreted by "the assured results of modern criticism." They say that we must go back to sources "behind" our present Gospel narratives to find the "authentic" sayings of Jesus. Cults say the Bible is not enough; people must obey a book—the *Book of Mormon*, or *Science and Health with a Key*

² **hoardings** – billboards on a fence.

to the Scriptures by Mary Baker Eddy, or the Jehovah's Witnesses' *Watchtower* publications. Many Charismatics say that the Bible is not enough; it needs to be authenticated by miracles and signs. All such people are saying, "The Bible is a good start, but it needs a bit of help from us." People today are taught that preaching the Bible alone is not "power evangelism." "Unless we can do miracles," they say, "there will be no converts."

"No, Father Abraham," says the man in hell, "not the Bible alone—the Bible *plus!*" The Bible plus informal entertainment; the Bible plus background music...You choose the plus. You enthuse about it; you give lectures about it and write books about it. You can grow rich on it—"How I found the plus that helps the rather inadequate Bible." You hold summer schools and conferences and tell the world the method you have discovered of compensating for the failure of the Scriptures. And you are just like this man in hell, who had no love for God and thought of a way he could make up for the inadequacies of the Bible.

The God Who Speaks

Now, remember, Abraham was already in heaven when Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. Abraham had a unique perspective on the books of Moses and the Prophets. Abraham was there in the presence of God when the Lord gave the Word to Moses and to the prophets. He was listening to the Lord on those occasions when God commanded the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of illumination, to go to Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and assist them to understand His Word, to proclaim it and write the Scriptures, and write them accurately, even to the jots and tittles.³ Abraham heard God speak, and he knew the source and power of that which had come from the throne of the universe. From the lips of the living God had come those words. Abraham knew and loved them: they were spirit and life. They were powerful words, as effectual as when "God said, Let there be light, and there was light" (Gen 1:3).

The Almighty has broken the silence of the heavens. God has spoken to sinners. He has opened His heart and revealed His inmost being. He is there and He is not silent. We have His Word.

God's final Word

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, "God, who at sundry times and divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb 1:1-2).

God is a speaking God; and now in these last days, He has spoken by His Son—the Lord from heaven, the speaking Savior, the Prophet, God's final Word. The Lord Christ has said that no one knows the Father except the Son (Mat 11:27); He alone has that infinite acquaintance. There we have the immensity of the Almighty, and only the Son knows Him comprehensively. When at the end of His life He is praying, He is thanking the Father for all the help that He has had to discharge the commission that the Father has given Him (Joh 17). He has omitted nothing.

Then, when Jesus sends His Apostles into the world, He gives them the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth (Act 1:8)—and they also omit nothing. Everything has been provided—all that is needed for the 2,000 years of the church's history. When Paul acknowledges himself as an Apostle, he says, "And last of all he was seen of me also" (1Co 15:8). In other words, Paul was the last Apostle. No more apostles are needed. No house needs more than one satisfactory foundation!

The Miracle of the Scriptures

We have Moses, we have the Prophets, we have the Gospels, and we have the Epistles. We have them all in our own English language. We can hold them in our hands and read them. When John Jewel (1522-1571), one of the great English Reformers who became Bishop of Salisbury, was preaching on the Scriptures, he ended by rousing his congregation with these words:

Are you a father? Have you children? Read the Scriptures. Are you a king? Read the Scriptures. Are you a minister? Read the Scriptures. Has God blessed you with wealth? Read the Scriptures. Are you an usurer? Read the Scriptures. Are you a fornicator? Read the Scriptures. Are you in adversity? Read the Scriptures. Are you a sinner? Have you offended God? Read the Scriptures. Do you despair of the mercy of God? Read the Scriptures. Are you going out of this life? Read the Scriptures!

Abraham was saying words to this effect: "Do you want your brothers to see a miracle? Your brothers *have* a miracle; at every visit to the synagogue, they have in their hearing Moses and the Prophets. They may purchase for themselves Moses and the Prophets. They may read and memorize Moses and the Prophets." We, who live twenty centuries later, have more: we have the *Gospels*, the *Acts*, the letters and the book of *Revelation*. These new covenant writings are the miracle that leads the church into this new millennium.

³ **jots and tittles** – the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet and the smallest stroke used to make Hebrew letters (Mat 5:18).

When I take the Bible in my hand, I am holding a mighty work of God. I have something unique. Here is something miraculous in its independence of thought, in the comprehensiveness of its theme, in its utter and invincible confidence that it is the most relevant word to my own life and to the life of everyone.⁴ Sometimes in moments of doubt, our minds must rest in this: “I have the Bible. I have this great intrusion from heav-en, this book that comes from another world, in which we may hear the unique utterances of the Son of God.”

I have read much of human literature at its best, but I find here in this book something that is discontinuous with everything else. The Bible is a Word from God that knows me, that describes me, that searches me, that finds me (Heb 4:12-13). The Scripture speaks to our deepest needs. Here are concepts of unsurpassable grandeur, in words that are invincible in their sheer originality. Every Sunday when Gospel churches meet, they do so around this miracle. Every single service has this miracle at its center: not just those red letter Sundays when everything is just right; not merely when the Holy Spirit comes, convicts, and moves, but every time we are gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. When this book is in the center of our gathering, then we are meeting in the presence of a miracle. Do you say you want a miracle and then you will believe? Well, here it is!

The Sufficiency of the Bible

Abraham says no to signs and wonders as the means of saving sinners today, because here is the Bible, and it is sufficient.

Sufficient for salvation

The Apostle Paul tells us that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17)—or to paraphrase, faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” Abraham knows that this is God’s method. So then, you must go to a church where there is a man who has been sent to preach the Word of Christ. That has been and always will be the means of saving anyone. Not since the apostolic age has a single person come to faith in Christ through seeing someone raised from the dead, but millions have become believers through hearing the Word. Abraham knows that all the children who are there with him in the presence of God have been saved through the Bible, and that the millions more who will join him there will get to heaven in the same way. It is the Scriptures that make them all “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2Ti 3:15).

God in mercy has said, in effect, “I have as many people coming into the kingdom as the grains of sand on the sea-shore—they are all going to share heaven with Me. They are corrupted rebels, they provoke Me dreadfully; but I will forgive their sins, and I will do this for all who have believed in Jesus Christ. And this will be the way: by bringing My Word to them. I will send them a Christian neighbor. I will put them in a university and there they will meet witnessing students. I will work through a member of their family, or through the woman who works in that office with them, and I will bring them all to a congregation where they will hear the Word of God preached. That is the way I will rescue them from hell. They do not have to be scholars to understand the Scriptures, but I will open their understanding to know the way of salvation through faith in Christ as it is taught so plainly in the Bible.”

“The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple,” says the psalmist (Psa 19:7). Ordinary folk can read or hear this message of the Gospel and understand it. It tells us that we deserve eternal hell because we are sinners, but that Jesus, because He loves us, died for us that we might be saved (Rom 5:8). We have that message. If people will not listen to it, they will not be convinced even if God should change teeth fillings from amalgam⁵ to gold.

Sufficient for sanctification

The Scriptures are sufficient to make the man of God perfect. How far can the Scriptures take you? They can take you to total maturity; that is, they can enable you to be “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2Ti 3:17). What lies before us? What duties, challenges, and sacrifices will we be called upon to meet? The Bible will completely equip us for them. How can we become mature men and women? How will we become wise? How may we become conformed to the image of Christ? Through the Bible—that is God’s way.

The Scripture sanctifies and perfects what is imperfect. It thoroughly prepares us for the challenge of every good work and enables us to carry out whatever God may ask us to do. Every mountain God calls us to climb, every burden God calls us to bear, every service God calls us to give, every pressure God calls us to endure, every sacrifice God calls us to make—the Scriptures can enable us to do it all by comprehensively preparing us for every single good work.

They tell us how to do it, why we should do it, and give us strength for the task. They also warn us how not to do it. The Scriptures will complete that good work that God has begun in us (Phi 1:6). The Bible helps us to put away childish things

⁴ The Bible was written by some 40 different authors in 66 different books over a period of approximately 1,600 years, and yet has but one central theme and no errors in matters of faith, practice, science, or history!

⁵ **amalgam** – an alloy of mercury with another metal (usually silver) used by dentists to fill cavities in teeth.

(1Co 13:11). The Bible saves a man from being a wimp and delivers him from being a nerd. It is a supernatural blessing to have the Bible.

Sufficient to keep you standing

Our Lord Jesus Christ ends the Sermon on the Mount by speaking about a wise man who built his house upon a rock (Mat 7:24-27), and the storms, winds, and floods came, and the house still stood. That man was like the man who builds his life on the teaching of the Lord Jesus. Christ was looking forward down the centuries, even looking into our hideous twenty-first century. He knew all the storms that would be hurled at Christian boys or girls, the gales of scientific pretension, of philosophy and humanism, of materialism and fleshliness; yet He knew that every young Christian who stood on His teaching would survive any storm. The Savior was absolutely confident about it.

The professing Church would be in a hopeless and demoralized state should its members begin to believe that the Bible is insufficient for the task before them. The Roman Catholic Church, the Quakers, the modernists, the cults, and the Charismatics are all looking for some additional signs and voices. None of them is in a healthy state; none of them is convinced about the sufficiency of divine truth. The issue confronting the Christian is this: Are you contented with the Bible or not?

One man was being presented with what the Scripture was saying, verse after verse being quoted to him. Finally, in his opposition to those truths, he said, "Let's close the book and listen to the Spirit." Now that immature man was in the greatest danger. Sometimes when men say they are "listening to the Spirit," they are merely listening to their own hormones.

A checklist

1. *The Scriptures tell us what we are to think and do.* When an issue arises, we are to comb the Bible to find everything that God has said on that subject. We will not find answers to everything that we can imagine. There are "secret things" that "belong to the Lord our God" (Deu 29:29). But for everything of necessary importance for living a life pleasing to God, we will find all-sufficient help in the Bible. As we become increasingly familiar with its teaching, so our ability to formulate answers to our problems and questions will increase.

2. *We are to add nothing to the Scriptures.* God has not spoken to any individuals to give them any additional ideas about the future, Christian living, the nature of God, angels and demons, or life after death. These are all human speculations. Out-of-body sickness experiences, in which people think they see figures of light welcoming them through golden doors, are all flimsy foundations on which to believe that all is well between them and God.

What does the Bible say? Every time it says the word *sinner*, it is speaking your name. Every time it speaks of the blessings of those who believe, then you should cry out to God to give you the gift of faith. And do not stop praying until you know God has answered you. No additional words alleged to come from God bind our consciences so that we have to believe them. Our consciences are captive to the Word of God alone.

It would not matter for our Christian lives if we never heard one single "prophecy" or "saying of Jesus" not found in the New Testament, or one so-called "infallible utterance" made by a pope. It would not matter if we never attended a revival where the greatest preacher in the world was giving an inspiring sermon. It would not matter if we went through our entire lives and missed such words.

We have "Moses and the Prophets," and we must not miss their words. Every document placed alongside Scripture never fails to diminish the teaching of the Bible, and to say things that are contrary to Scripture itself.

3. *We are not to call anything "sin" that is not forbidden in Scripture,* either explicitly or by implication. The cults would say that God has given them the authority to impose additional moral rules upon all their followers. They may forbid blood transfusions, or eating meat on Fridays, or keeping the food laws of the Old Testament. They may prohibit wearing ties or working for non-Christians. Widespread disobedience and false guilt are the result of such directives. Fellowship with Christians who do not practice the additional rules is broken. The duty of keeping these regulations is blown out of all proportion to the alleged benefits they may bring.

The Holy Spirit does not empower obedience to rules that do not have God's approval. Consequently, they are kept by the flesh, and defense of those practices is made by one's own wits. "Victory" over their transgression is sought by penance and prayers, yet no victory is given. When such behavior patterns fit into one's own constitutional preferences, smugness and pride flourish.

God has given us "Moses and the Prophets," and it is enough for us to spend our days heeding their wise commandments without adding the burden of keeping other laws.

4. *Nothing is required of us by God outside Moses and the Prophets.* Should a pastor inform us that we should take a certain course of action, get involved in a particular relationship, take money from the bank account for a specific expenditure, change our employment, or move our abode, then it is never sinful to think about the suggestion, smile sweetly and say, "No, I won't do that." We all have the same heavenly Father. We have the same access as to Moses and the Prophets as any leader in the church, and unless the principle or implication of those writings guides us to agree, we are free to say no.

Christians find guidance in the Bible alone, not in coincidences, changes in circumstances, or feelings of animosity or delight. God speaks in the Word and says, “Be this kind of spouse, parent, or child. Live in society in this way. Follow these guidelines as a church member. Believe these things about God and make these your emphases in daily living.” As we study the Scriptures, we gain more peace and freedom as Christians.

5. *We should be content with Moses and the Prophets.* There is much we do not know because God has not revealed it to us. Let us believe in the wisdom of this divine decision. It has not made the Bible any less helpful, and the omissions are no excuse for our being less diligent in heeding what is there. Small issues may arise that require an inordinate amount of time to reach a conclusion. One word from God, we may think, would have satisfied us, and so Roman traditions, and the cults’ authority, and “prophecies and tongues,” and the elevation of the subordinate standards of the church become a new foundation for our convictions.

The issues themselves may not be unimportant, but we must not judge that what Scripture says about them is inadequate. When a theme has received relatively little direct emphasis in Scripture, it is ironic that certain men have nevertheless, virtually given their lives and sacrificed friendship and fellowship in maintaining one interpretation as sacrosanct.⁶ Are they motivated by pride that they have insight? Or in the desire to impose a unity on the church, have they absolutized this teaching to a messianic message that they think can deliver congregations from all kinds of errors? We have to be content with the balance of truth found in Moses and the Prophets. Skilful inference is very different from direct Biblical statement. The necessary truths of belief and conduct are very plainly taught in the Scriptures.

Conclusion

The person who is perishing thinks that the Word of God is foolishness. The psalmist says, “Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes” (Psa 119:155).

As far as the east is from the west, so far is salvation from the wicked. And this is because they are not seeking out God’s Word. They are not saying, “My life is in a mess, my marriage is dreadful, I don’t know where I’m going. The years are slipping by and I’m frittering my life away; death is coming nearer and nearer, so let me leave this city of destruction and find a place where the Bible is taught. Let me find a preacher who will preach the Lord to me. Let me take the Book of God down from the shelf and blow the dust off it. Let me read it. Let me cry mightily to God that He will show me what is in Moses and the Prophets. Let me go to that religious acquaintance that I’ve shunned for so long, and let him tell me where I may find life.”

The rich man in the parable was an ignorant man when he lived in this world, and he is still an ignorant man in hell. God says, “But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant” (1Co 14:38). That man has never faced up to the reality of the human condition. He thinks that all that is needed for people to believe is a miracle, some resurrection from the dead. In his own eyes he is always wiser than God, and he never acknowledges the hostility to Almighty God that still exists in his heart. He snarls, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey” Him? (Exo 5:2).

People do not want the Bible, because the One Who speaks to us in its pages is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is always so inconvenient to bow the knee to Him and promise to serve and follow Him. It will mean taking up the cross every day, denying ourselves, and walking in His steps (Mat 16:24). That is the reason why people do not believe in Him. Not because of lack of evidence, not because of the inadequacy of the Bible, not because there are no miracle workers in this century—it is because men and women do not want God. It was the people who saw Jesus’ miracles who cried “Crucify him!” Nine of the ten men healed of leprosy could still not be bothered to give any doxology to the Lord (Luk 17:12-19).

God has given this Word as the means of sinners’ salvation. Then let us be satisfied with it, heed it, and obey it. ❧

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”—2 Timothy 3:16-17

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”
—Hebrews 4:12-13

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”—Psalm 119:105



⁶ **sacrosanct** – necessary not to be violated.