

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

"...Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body." - Ephesians 5:23

Volume 30

Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

June, 1996

No. 6

Bible Difficulties? Yes Contradictions? No!

by Ted J. Clarke

Introduction

The Bible is a truly marvelous book which has been used by hundreds of millions to their benefit and happiness. Its teachings have also been misused to inflict torture and death upon millions. However, it is unfair to charge the Bible with causing the problems which arise from a lack of understanding or a perversion of its teaching. Those who do not study the Scriptures for the purpose of gaining insight into God's will for mankind will often think that they have discovered and unsolvable contradiction, which proves that the Bible did not originate with an all-knowing God. Can the Bible stand the tests of the thousands who hold it up to ridicule, claiming that it is "full of contradictions"?

A large part of the problem of supposed contradictions stems from one's failure to understand what kind of book the Bible claims to be and is. The Bible is really a library of sixty-six books written over a period of about 1500 years; written by about forty different men who lived at different times in different places and cultures of the world. Yet, the Bible is a unit, with the books of these widely diverse authors fitting together like the pieces of a puzzle. These men claim to have been speaking the "word of the Lord" and to have been led to speak by God's Spirit. Perhaps Second Samuel 23:2 best expresses this claim when David says, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me and His word was in my tongue." Some New Testament passages claiming inspiration are Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17/ 2 Peter 1:19-21; John 10:34-35; and 1 Peter 1:10-11.

Of course, extraordinary claims demand extraordinary proof, and we believe that the Scriptures offer that very proof in the composition and content of the Bible. Could anything less than an inspired book be free from error and contradiction if it were written by over forty men over 1500 years in widely di-

verse places and cultures? One should not deny that there are difficulties in the Bible, for difficulty in our understanding various types of problems does not destroy the concept of inspiration. However, a valid contradiction between men who claimed the guidance of an all-knowing God would negate inspiration, if it could be established that what was contradictory was part of the original writings of the Bible's authors. There are plenty of people who are willing to assert such contradictions exist without probing it. Even supposed friends of the Scriptures sometimes contend for occasional contradictions in historical matters, while claiming inerrancy for strictly religious teachings. Bible believers may admit that difficulties exist with our present text and understanding, without admitting that any actual contradictions were a part of the original sacred writings. The Scriptures claim an inerrancy for themselves which does not allow for actual contradictions. See the Scriptures cited in the previous paragraph.

Problems and Solutions

Difficulties can be found in the text of the Bible. Second Peter 3:16 speaks of some things that Paul wrote as "hard to be understood," but these are never spoken of as contradictory to the rest of the Bible. Difficulties can also arise from (1) improper translation; (2) copyist's error; (3) faulty hermeneutics [ways of interpreting]; (4) our own ignorance or lack of sufficient information, part of which may be due to the condensed nature of large sections of Scriptures; and, (5) perhaps the largest number of difficulties are manufactured by those who wish to destroy the Bible's teaching. However, these difficulties can be solved and do not mitigate against the divine inspiration of the Bible. Anyone who asserts that actual contradictions exist in the Bible and were present in the original manuscripts strikes at the very heart of the nature of the Bible as the inspired

word of God. If the Bible has errors in it, then it does not live up to its claim to be the word of the all-powerful, all-knowing God. Or, one could say that this supposedly omnipotent, omniscient Deity could not preserve His word from corruption. In either case the absolute truthfulness of the Scriptures would be compromised and we would have no infallible standard by which to guide our lives. We could only guess which parts of the Bible were true and which were false. Thankfully, God did give us a completely trustworthy Book!

Difficulties can be resolved, contradictions cannot be. This is a crucial difference between the two terms. Two statements about a person, place, or thing are not contradictory just because they differ. They are contradictory only when both cannot be true regarding the same thing, in the same place, and at the same time. For example, God is charged with being capricious because he said in Genesis 1:31 that his creation was "very good," while in Genesis 6:5-7 he portrays mankind as corrupt and is ready to destroy the world. Obviously, God's differing attitudes are not a result of his whimsy, but of drastic changes in the nature of mankind's actions between these two times.

A contradiction may be "apparent," meaning that it appears to be real, but actually is not. Unless we know someone to be a liar, there is a principle of charity that attaches to one's statements, spoken or written. J. W. McGarvey properly notes, regarding alleged contradictory statements, "If, on any rational hypothesis, we may suppose them both to be true, we cannot rightfully pronounce them contradictory. We are not bound to show the truth of the given hypothesis; but only that it may be true. If it is at all possible, then it is possible that no contradiction exists; if it is probable, then it is probable that no contradiction exists; and the degree of the latter probability is measured by that of the former." [*Evidences Of Christianity, Part III* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1964), p. 31f] Anyone rejecting a proposed solution to an alleged contradiction must show that it

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

USPO Publication No. 211780

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

P. O. Box 251

Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

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is either impossible or improbable. One cannot reject a possible solution simply because he does not want to believe it, due to prejudice against the Scriptures. Those who would do so demonstrate that they are less concerned with truth than acrimony.

God's Word Stands Unharmd

The fact that hundreds of alleged contradictions in the Scriptures have been shown to have real or probable solutions should fortify us against the worry that any actual contradictions will ever be found which destroy faith in God's inspiration of the Bible. "God... cannot lie" (Titus 1:2). We assert that it is possible to propose reasonable solution to every so-called contradiction which opponents of the Bible suggest. In most cases it will be possible to set forth irrefutable evidence which shows the claim of contradiction to be absolutely false. In other cases we may be able only to set forth one or more probable to possible explanations as to why no contradiction exists. There may be even rare instances where we must say in candor that we do not know why there appears to be a contradiction, but here is a possible solution, even if the proposed solution is difficult itself. Does this last point mean that there may indeed be discrepancies and contradictions in the Bible? No! When hundreds or thousands of supposed contradictions have been shown to be false, the very few that we do not understand as clearly as we would like are no reason to discard the concept that the Bible is inspired of God. It may

well be that the problem is our lack of information on our own ignorance. Time and new discoveries have revealed that many things previously thought to be errors in the Scriptures are easily resolved when we have sufficient information.

The following quotes from an unpublished manuscript by James D. Bales represent sound thinking in this area. "The Bible has withstood so many attacks in the past, that we ought to have confidence and listen to the voice of the ages rather than the howl of the moment. Christ [and the Scriptures-tjc] has so often been shown to be right that one is wise to trust Him even though one cannot at the moment answer certain questions... [W]e must realize that the nature of faith is such that we cannot be coerced into believing. We are always left with a choice. The freedom of man is taken into consideration by Christianity. Therefore, we should not expect that the case for Christianity is so overwhelming that an individual cannot resist it." I have heard critics of the Bible, when given plain proof against a contradiction or discrepancy (or at least a reasonable possibility), say, "You can believe it if you want to. I choose not to." They did not respond to the proof or possibility, they just said that they did not want to believe it or consider it possible. Brother Bales continued, "[D]eal with the problem in humility. Because you do not see the answer at the moment does not mean there is no answer. Ours is not the first generation to be faced with difficulties. By consulting various individuals and books, as well as by meditation on the problem, one may find the answer... [W]hen we have reason to trust a friend, we do not distrust him just because someone raises a question. When time after time a friend has been shown to be trustworthy, we have confidence in him even where we cannot check him. We give him the benefit of the doubt when some doubt is raised. We do not discredit him just because someone raises a question which we cannot at the moment answer... When we are sorely tried by some difficulty, let us reflect on the reasons for faith in Christ, on what He has brought to our lives, and on the fact that **if we turn from Him there is no one to whom we can go for light on life and its destiny**" [emphasis mine-tjc].

Conclusion

A poem by John Clifford will serve as a fitting conclusion to this article. The poem, of course, is not proof of the

Bible's inspiration, but it does express the overall failure of the Bible's critics (past and present) to destroy it.

"THE HAMMER AND THE ANVIL"

by John Clifford

Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
When looking in, I saw upon the floor,
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.

"How many anvils have you had," said I,
"To wear and batter all these hammers so?"
"Just one," said he; then said with twinkling eye,
"The anvil wears the hammers out, you know."

And so, I thought, the anvil of God's word
For ages skeptics blows have beat upon;
Yet through the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unharmd - the hammers gone!

Voluntary Humility

by Burt Jones

"Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Colossians 2:18, 19).

This passage, just as the rose opening in spring, does not immediately reveal all of its beauty to one who gives it only a casual glance. As we study the deeper truths of this phrase, we see it unfolding in its brilliance and dispensing its fragrance.

Paul urges us to be on the alert lest those who make a vain show of humility (who even boast of visions and dreams and engage in will-worship) and do not hold to the Head of the church, cause us to lose the prize - eternal life.

Voluntary humility may manifest itself in self-chosen worship, fasting, mortification of the physical body, elaborate ritual, wearing uncomely garb, or bowing to angels, spirits, and saints. Humility is required by the true God, but it must be shown according to requirement. It is not humility which the text condemns, it is the presumption that dares to show itself through unauthorized expressions contrary to what God has commanded.

There are some excellent Bible examples of voluntary humility. Cain showed humility. That he made a sacrifice in the selection and preparation of his offering none would dispute. Nevertheless, God rejected that which he tendered. On what

ground? It was not offered by faith (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:4). It was an act of voluntary, self-willed, humility.

Saul was guilty of planning will-worship or voluntary humility. God had commanded the slaying of the Amalekites and their flocks and herds. Saul spared the fattest animals with the intent of showing humility **his way**, by worshiping at the altar from which the smoke of his ill-gained sacrifices ascended to God. Samuel the prophet rebuked him, saying, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (I Kings 15:22). Voluntary humility **cannot** be substituted for what God commands.

In the days of Jesus upon this earth the Jews had an elaborate system of voluntary humility. "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9). All of their giving of alms, the disfiguring of their countenances, their long prayers, their ceremonial hand-washing and their fasting proved to be of their own will (cf. Matthew 6:1ff).

Someone states, "Well there isn't anything like that now, so why dredge up some Old Testament problem?" Dear reader, modern day religious systems are **saturated** with voluntary humility. Man-made saints, bead-counting, penances, the recitation of personal testimony, the use of instrumental music, sprinkling and pouring for baptism, are but a sampling of those devices that can be described as voluntary humility. The observance of days such as "Good Friday," "Easter," "Christmas," "Maundy Thursday," and "Good Friday," all fall into the classification of voluntary humility.

Formality and pride have fostered many innovations through the centuries. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about his concern that it might forsake the simplicity of the gospel (II Corinthians 11:3). Pretentious piety has fathered many departures, and superior sanctity has begotten many religious freaks.

May God help us to avoid the voluntary humility born of the imagination of men's hearts and hold fast to the Head. There is that humility which is commanded throughout holy writ, and there is the false humility, the **voluntary** humility, spawned in the shallow and superficial recesses of the mind of man. Choose you this day...!

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Why Didn't Jesus Say "He That Believeth Not And Is Baptized Not Shall Be Damned"?

by B. J. Clarke

Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). This truth is "ungetaroundable" for those who would deny the essentiality of water baptism. Just as 2+2=4, so likewise does Belief + Baptism = Salvation. It is not just he that believeth that shall be saved. Furthermore, it is not just he that is baptized who shall be saved, but rather he that *believeth* and is baptized who shall be saved (Mark 16:16).

But what about the latter part of the passage where Jesus says, "but he that believeth not shall be damned"? Opponents of the necessity of baptism will sometimes say, "If baptism is so important to our salvation, then why didn't Jesus say, 'He that believeth not and is baptized not shall be damned'?" They would argue that since Jesus only mentioned not believing as a condition of being damned, that believing is the only condition of salvation. The answer to such a quibble is seen in both a scriptural

and practical way. In *John 3:18*, Jesus said, "he who does not believe is condemned already." Hence, if a man is an unbeliever, he is lost. Jesus didn't waste words. In all of the time that I have been preaching, I have never yet had someone say, "I don't believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Would you baptize me?" Jesus didn't say "he that believeth not and is baptized not shall be damned" for the simple reason that is a man doesn't believe, he will never desire to be baptized. His unbelief is sufficient all by itself to damn his soul. For example, Jesus didn't say, "he that believeth not and repenteth not shall be damned," because if a man doesn't first believe, he will never be led to repentance. If I say, *He that eateth and digesteth shall live, but he that eateth not shall die*, it is not necessary for me to mention digestion in the latter part of the statement, because if a man doesn't do the first thing (eating), he will never do the second thing (digesting). Likewise, Jesus knew that if a man didn't do the first thing (believing), he would never do the second thing (be baptized). In short, the teaching of Mark 16:16 shows us that it takes one condition to damn our soul, but there are at least two conditions (Belief + Baptism) necessary to the saving of it.

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Dellhalf Church of Christ, Myrtle, Mo.	25.00
Church of Christ, Viola, Ar.	15.00
Lowell Church of Christ Springdale, Ar.	50.00
Souder Church of Christ, Souder, Mo.	25.00
McFadden Church of Christ Hickory Ridge, Ar.	15.00
Jeff Church of Christ, Thayer, Mo.	25.00
Welcome Hill Church of Christ Mammoth Spring, AR.	25.00
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Pilot Church of Christ Mammoth Spring, Ar.	25.00
Church of Christ, Bakersfield, Mo.	25.00
Church of Christ, Moody, Mo.	25.00
Church of Christ, Clarkridge, Ar.	75.00
Church of Christ, Garfield, Ar.	35.00

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ONE DAY, THEY'LL BE GROWN!

by Neal Pollard

Religious error is the sand beneath the foundations of all denominations, cults, Catholicism, and the world religions, save New Testament Christianity, in either hemisphere (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:11). With parallel imagery, moral error is the soft, sliding mud under the dilapidated structures of sexual immorality and media's portrayal of filthy and perverted acts as fine and normal! Can any rational one doubt it?

Yet, some "Christian" (?) parents continue to be accomplices of the ungodly as they allow and encourage (at least by co-participation) their offspring to be exposed to messages and images as un-Christlike as any facet of darkness! The unmarried and unfaithful, though fictional characters, engage, before little eyes, in on-screen intercourse and lewdness, and it's portrayed as glamorous, fulfilling, and exciting.

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Can we expect our children to be confronted by such an assault on biblical values without their being permanently affected? From very early ages, children are shaping their ideas of right and wrong. In other words, they are "learning." At the impressionable stages of their lives, from whom are they learning? The professors of petting, pornography, promiscuity, and profanity? The teachers of television, talk-shows, and titillation? In the homerooms of homosexuality, hedonism, and the hard-core? At the school of "safe sex," sensuality, and Stern?

Be aware. Many of our children, from kindergarten to college, are being filled with the entertainment industry's indoctrination of immorality. The educational systems in too many places, under federal mandates, are constrained to teach forms of *sex education* anti-biblical in nature. Much of this can be avoided!

How? Parents, do you allow your children to go to R-rated movies (remember, the "R" stands for restricted. Why is it "restricted"? Do you rent R-rated movies? Does your family, in television viewing, watch shows which promote and validate sexual and violent actions you know the Bible to condemn? Do you know to which radio stations, music groups, and songs your young people listen? What values do the friends of your children have (take notice of their peers' clothing, attitude, and language)?

Consider a few facts. A few years ago, *2 Live Crew* released a single album with nearly 700 profane and vulgar words.¹ MTV continuously introduces music videos and features which take aim against religion, modesty, virginity, purity, and ethics. The result of a sex-education program [which approach is "abstinence is unrealistic," "at least be protected," and "if it brings pleasure, it is perfectly acceptable"] is, among other tragedies, an 87% increase in unwed pregnancies among girls between the ages of 15 and 19, a 67% increase in abortions among teenagers, and a 61% increase in unwed births.² Friends, these statistics are less than the fog above the tip of a huge iceberg!

Our young people are daily inundated with garbage about sex that ignores the natural, beautiful expression of that which God has sanctioned **only** within the bounds of marriage (cf. 1 Cor. 7)! Where there is an absence of morality and the self-control of righteousness, a nation is a reproach before God and

doomed to come undone (cf. Proverbs 14:34). The young people of our world today will one day be our nation's leaders and lawmakers. That knowledge surely fills us with a desire, as parents and grandparents, to train up our children in the way they *should* go (cf. Proverbs 22:16).

1. David T. Moore, *Five Lies of the Century* (Wheaton, IL; Tyndale House, 1995), 263.

2. *Ibid.*, 186

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WRONG IS ALWAYS WRONG...

In a period of loose sagging morals, Satan provides many rationalizations for improper behavior. Those who would live faithful Christian lives must not be "ignorant of his devices" (II Cor. 2:11). Wrong doing is always wrong despite our efforts to excuse our actions.

WRONG IS WRONG EVEN IF YOU DON'T GET CAUGHT...

Let us remember that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and good" (Prov. 15:13).

WRONG IS WRONG EVEN IF YOU DO IT FOR A GOOD CAUSE...

The honorable purpose does not justify a dishonorable deed or action. The end never does justify the means. "All sin is transgression of the law" (I John 3:4; 5:17; II John 9).

WRONG IS WRONG EVEN IF OTHERS ARE DOING WORSE THINGS...

It will be little comfort to you in the day of judgment if you should be lost, that others you knew did things which you considered worse than your own sins.

WRONG IS WRONG EVEN IF IT DOESN'T BOTHER YOUR CONSCIENCE...

The conscience can be trained or educated to accept wrong doing, but even an honest sin or evil done in sincerity is sinful in the sight of the Holy God. "...Whatever a man sows, that shall a man reap..." (Gal. 6:7)

MY JOY IN LIFE

It is my joy in life to find
At every turning of the road,
The strong arm of a comrade kind
To help me onward with my load.
And since I have no gold to give,
And love alone must make amends
My only prayer is, while I live,
God, make me worthy of my friends.

-Anonymous

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2,3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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Publication # 211790