

“Orthodoxy” (Titus 2:1)

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But speak the things that are proper for sound doctrine

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A husband said to his wife, *These pancakes don’t look right, I don’t think we should eat them.* She cut off a tiny piece and tasted it: it made her so ill that she died. She had mistaken insect powder for pancake flour. She was sincere, but sincerely mistaken. Mistaking insect powder for pancake flour cost her, her life.

I have had people tell me many times; *it doesn’t matter what we believe, just as long as we are sincere.* Sincerity is praiseworthy, but in itself it is insufficient. It must be coupled with knowledge, or it may prove disastrous. I want to affirm you, by all means, be sincere, but be sure your sincerity is combined with the truth of God’s Word. Error is deadly; to sincerely accept error for truth is certainly going to be tragically fatal were eternal issues are at stake.

Many people discredit the Bible, the Virgin birth of Christ, the efficacious of His blood and many other fundamental, indispensable truths of the Word and are doing it on the basis of freedom. The kind of freedom, which they experience, is like taking a boat over Niagara Falls to destruction. They have thrown everything overboard, the chart, the compass and the steering wheel while at the same time conscious of the destination. Therefore they are free from everything, everything except the rocks, the storms, and the awful, turbulent agony of meaningless living.

Nietzsche, a German philosopher raved against the ways of Jesus as, slave morality. He declared that he was going to be free, but finally he cried out, *Where is my home? For it do I ask and have sought, but have not found it. Oh, eternal everywhere! Oh, eternal nowhere! Oh, eternal in vain!* Certainly there is a sting in the last two words, “in vain.”

There is a sense of futility and meaningless strife that has settled upon many people. Too many have discarded both the orthodoxy of creed and deed. We can climb up on the shoulders of the past and live there for a while, but then comes a time when we must open our eyes and see correctly for ourselves. It seems as if we have decided that the only way for real progress is to become clever heretics.

We have taken our cars to the top of a mountain and started coasting them down the grade with the brakes off, and are now beginning to realize that there is going to be an inevitable crash. Yet we don’t seem to have sense enough to realize or at least acknowledge that the foreshadowing catastrophe is the result of our failure to think right, act right and live right. We need to seek those things that become sound doctrine and hold fast to that which is good. Go back and read what might be called noble history and we discover that its foundation has always been orthodoxy.

People have loved truth better than life. Abel followed his convictions and was murdered for them. Abraham left his home and country. The three young Hebrew men were not afraid of the fiery furnace. And we can think of the decisions that many reformers across the church made. As we now journey through Pentecost, we remember Jesus faced the cross for the same reason. I know that the word “orthodoxy” does not appear in the Bible. Neither does the word, “creed,” or, “incarnation,” but Paul says to Titus, *“You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.”*

In the Christian faith, orthodoxy is the doctrine of the Bible, unadulterated and unaltered. An orthodox Christian is one, who believes in the truths presented in the Holy Spirit, inspired inerrant, unalterable and unadulterated Word of God. The life of Christian orthodoxy is Christ. He is Alpha and Omega. A person is not an orthodox Christian simply because they believe in Christ. A humanitarian may go that far. Many extol Christ's character and life, setting Him up wholly as an example for humanity to follow and then say, "Why discuss the matter further?"

When we set Christ up as a mere example we are setting aside a large portion of the Word of God. It robs Christ of His divinity, His purpose in coming in this world, His accomplishments while here and the ministry He now carries out for us at the right hand of the Father. To say that Christ is an example of character and life and then to declare that we should not present Him as anymore than that to the world is highly delightful to the devil and all the demons of Hell. Millions of people are being blinded and deluded by such heresy and are plunging headlong into Hell. We cannot dismember Christ. He is more than an example of character, life and benevolence. He is priest, prophet and king. As priest, He made atonement for sin on Calvary and therefore is the substitute for sinful people everywhere. On Calvary He laid His heart open and sacrificed every drop of blood that was in himself in order that a sin contaminated, sin practising, spiritually blind, devil directed world might recognise its condition and have a way provided whereby it could get back to God and to heaven. If we really believe in Jesus Christ, we must believe in His atoning blood.

"He was wounded for our transgressions." Isaiah 53:6

Someone once said that we have three "R's" of the Bible. "Ruin, Redemption, and Regeneration." The word, "ruin," reveals that we were all ruined in the fall. We were all lost when Adam sinned; we were all ruined by our own evil hearts and our own wicked will. And we shall be ruined eternally unless we permit the grace of God to accomplish what God has promised.

"Redemption," declares that we are ransomed by the blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish and without spot. We are rescued by His power, ransomed by His merit and redeemed by His strength.

"Regeneration" means we must not only be pardoned, but regenerated. We can't really partake of the redemption, which God has provided, unless we are regenerated in our hearts, the old things having passed away and all things having become new.

One can endeavour in their own strength and by their own power to serve God up to their highest ability and their greatest possible imagination. But until one has been regenerated, born again and filled with the Spirit of God, such a person will be under the classification of the "R" for "Ruin."

These are great truths that lead a person to realize on their own that heaven is desirable and that Hell is terrible; time is short, eternity is infinite and the soul is precious; God is eternal and His words are sure.

Jesus as a prophet had much to say concerning God, sin, spiritual death, life, immortality, the resurrection of the body and the final judgement. For each one of these subjects and doctrines, His Word is reliable. It is the only and final authority. It is the court of last appeal. Therefore we must say with Paul,

Let God be true, but every person a liar.... That you may be justified in your words, and may overcome when you are judged. (Romans 3: 3,4 – quoting, Psalm 51:4).

Christ is our King. Therefore it is a delight for every Christian to call Him, “Master and Lord.” He becomes our manner of life in every sphere of living. We not only love to live as He desires but we purpose to carry out His commands to evangelise throughout the world. We know that His Word is the authority and that from it there will be no swerving. The obedience of a child of God stems from love and not legalism. Therefore, I believe we are glad to honour Jesus as Christ and Saviour, Sanctifier, Keeper and King.

The symbol of Christian orthodoxy is the Bible. As Presbyterians we hold this to be dear and true. The sung declaration, “*On Christ, the solid Rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand!*” The Scripture of the Old and New Testaments are the only authoritative source of information concerning God and His Son Jesus. Without this precious Word, Jesus Christ is a mere name and meaningless except for sentimental use. Some accept the Old Testament and reject the New while others accept the New and reject the Old. As believers, we accept both as the inspired Word of God that speaks to us across the ages. Just as it takes two hemispheres to make our world, so it requires two Testaments to make one complete record of God’s Word. Jesus is the incarnate Word; the Scriptures are the written Word. Together they make a complete revelation. Our religion is not a book, but Christ who is reliably described in the Book of Books. What a joy to know that it is still the most distributed printed word in the most languages around the globe.

I was thinking of a suitable metaphor to affirm how important the Bible is:

You tell the plumber that you want water in your house. He answers, “Don’t worry, we will have the pipes put in right away.” “But,” you might answer, “who said anything about pipes? It is water that I want.” And so it is with the Bible, the Word, or no Christ. That is the medium through which Christ comes authoritatively to us. The writer of Hebrews declares:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers, through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

(Hebrews 1:1)

The patriarchs, prophets and apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writing concerning Christ’s coming, His actual ministry on earth and then His return, have left us with a great heritage of facts, truths, prophetic utterances and spiritual values. Because of this we should do as another has written, “*Know it in our heads, stow it in our hearts, show it in our lives and sow it in the world.*” We know that Jesus confirmed the Scriptures as setting forth the plan of salvation, which centres upon Him. He quoted Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and at least one verse from each of the minor prophets. He referred to Adam and Eve, Abel, Noah, the flood, Abraham, the destruction of Sodom, Lot’s wife, Jacob’s ladder, the burning bush, the manna, the brazen serpent, the Queen of Sheba and Jonah. He never hinted or suggested that any part of the Scripture was untrustworthy. Therefore if we accept Jesus Christ, we must accept His Word. The conclusion is irresistible. He commended the Scriptures as decisive when He said,

“You diligently study the Scriptures, because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.” (John 5:39).

We need to study the Scriptures with all the help and scholarship available to us. To do this effectively we need to have a heartfelt experience with the help of the Holy Spirit, daily.

The administrator of Christian orthodoxy is the Holy Spirit. He reveals the truth of the Scriptures. I have stood and looked at the dials, the knobs and the multiple gadgets in the cockpit of a 747. I was completely bewildered and was glad that there was a qualified captain there who knew what each knob and switch was about. He was connected to the equipment of the 747 through learning about it to the point he had mastered it. In the same way the Bible is an unknown language to one who has not been taught it, but with the presence of the Holy Spirit, we have a teacher who is able to make it clear. He opens our eyes and gives light, light on the incarnation, on Calvary, on the resurrection and on the love of God. If we follow His directions, He will lead us into all truth and understanding. Those who have fallen into error have done so because they either failed to consult the Holy Spirit or have been unwilling to be guided by Him, for the Word declares,

“...if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all men without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5).

Mere human wisdom desperately and intolerable, opposes the work of the Holy Spirit and this is one of the great tragedies and sources of difficulty in this hour in which we live. I invite all of you to commit to God's Word and receive it as Christian orthodoxy. With love for the truth and fear in the presence of God, let us stand unflinchingly and pay obeisance to this eternal, unalterable and inerrant truth of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.