

REASON AND FAITH

By

Curtis Dickinson

“Come now, and let us reason together, says Yahweh” (Isa. 1:18)

A charismatic preacher was coaching the audience on how to “receive” the baptism of the Holy Spirit and talk in tongues. He said, “Just put your mind in neutral, and let the Spirit take control.” This advice is in diametric opposition to the fact that the Holy Spirit produces self-control, but it is like what a great many are telling us today. “Just give up, and let God take control.” We are told that we must have a “personal relationship with Jesus,” and many think to attain this through some mystical or paranormal experience. They may read worthless books and shop around from one church to another, often falling prey to some false teaching that leaves them disappointed and skeptical.

A Christian may, indeed, have the joy of a personal relationship with Jesus, but it is attained through faith and obedience. This faith is not the result of mystic experiences but is produced by understanding and believing the truth as revealed in scripture.

When evangelist Philip encountered the Ethiopian on his way home from Jerusalem, he found him reading from the book of Isaiah, chapter thirteen (Acts 8:26-39). Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He then taught him the meaning of Christ’s death, as prophesied by Isaiah. As the Ethiopian came to understand” and they arrived at a place where there was water, he asked to be baptized. After the baptism he went on his way rejoicing as a Christian. His conversion was not influenced by the emotional setting of a revival atmosphere, with the choir singing “Just As I Am.” He was not inspired by music, or influenced by emotion-packed stories and illustrations. It was when he came to understand the message of the gospel that his faith came to fruition, and he became an obedient believer.

The Psalmist recognized the importance of understanding the truth. “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts...Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law.” (Psalm 119:27, 34). The gospel is “good news.” But if a message is not understood it is not news of any kind to the hearer.

Jesus told the multitude to “hear and understand” (Matt. 15:10). In the parable of the Sower he said, “when anyone hears the word of the kingdom and understands it not, then comes the evil one and snatches away that which has been sown in his heart” (Matt. 13: 19). Paul’s prayer for the church was that they may “be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col. 1:9). He wrote to the Romans that they were to be transformed by a renewal of their minds (Rom. 12:1-2).

Society, which is satiated with entertainment, is ever seeking some means of greater excitement. Churches that have left their first love (of the truth in Christ) are ever willing

to try to provide that excitement through innovations in the “worship” and by charismatic performers in the pulpit. One church ad read: “our goal is to make you happy. Come casual. Football updates.” Some churches promise miracles. “Expect a miracle,” they say. They present their “worship services” as exciting events. A revolution is an exciting adventure, but always destructive and often deadly. So it is with innovations in regard to the faith: exciting, but deadly.

A great portion of what is called Christianity today is based, not on an understanding of what is found in God’s revealed word, but upon tradition and emotional experiences. This is distinctly different from apostolic example, as expressed by Robert Hach: “In the first century, the Christian faith, under apostolic guidance, was a matter of ‘spiritual wisdom and understanding’ (Col. 19). This ‘wisdom and understanding’ was ‘spiritual’ in the sense that it was revealed by God’s Spirit through Jesus’ gospel of the kingdom of God. To receive ‘wisdom and understanding’ was to understand Jesus’ gospel, not to undergo a religious experience. Which is to say that the knowledge of God and God’s will was rational rather than mystical.” (*Possession and Persuasion*, Xlibris Corporation, 2001, Pg.60)

It is a dangerous error for people to place their confidence in some personal experience, which they mistakenly interpret to mean that somehow they have met God’s approval. Often we have heard people say that the way to evangelize is to tell what Christ means to us. This is good, so far as it goes, but it falls far short of being a witness to the gospel. Telling of my own dramatic experiences in life says nothing of the purpose of God and how He carries it out through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Apostolic writing gives no evidence that “religious experiences” were used in evangelism as they are today. Rather, those converted to Christ experienced the faith, faith that He is the Son of God, faith in what He taught and in what He did in his death and resurrection. That is why Paul wrote; “belief comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). It was Paul’s custom to “reason” with his audience from the scriptures (Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 24:25). This-should tell us that the Christian faith is based upon a rational understanding of that which God has revealed.

Beware when anyone claims to be directed by hearing God’s voice. The sweetest inner voice will mislead us, unless it is based upon God’s word. Paul said that even if an angel were to speak to us, if it is contrary to scripture, we should reject it. “God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, has at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son” (Heb. 1:1-2). We should seek no other voice than the one that speaks to us through the Bible.

We need to seriously ask whether the doctrine (teaching) taught in the church is actually grounded in a thorough understanding of the scripture or if it is designed to protect certain traditional concepts, some of which crept into the church through such men as Clement, Origen and Augustine, or others who were schooled in Greek philosophy rather than in scriptures. We must remember, also, that some religious leaders try not so hard to understand Bible doctrine as they do to control it and see that no one grows beyond their sect’s orthodoxy.

Popular expressions among evangelists are; “Just put your trust in Jesus,” and “Invite Jesus into your heart.” But to receive salvation one must believe in the Jesus who really is, that is, the Jesus of the Bible. This means that one must understand that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the flesh and blood descendant of David, the man who, according to prophecy was born of a woman, the virgin Mary, a birth originated by the divine power of God’s Holy Spirit [Greek: holy breath], making him “the only begotten son of God” (Gal. 4:4; Matt. 1:20). Contrary to the complicated pronouncements of the creed makers of the early centuries, it is not difficult to understand the identity of Jesus. Paul wrote that God “would have all men come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, one mediator also between God and man, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:4-6). The Messiah is not only the one sent to die for man’s sins. but he is also the High Priest for all believers, and the King to whom God has given all authority.

Some people tend to think that their religious ideas are so widespread because they are true. Not so. They are popular because they are traditional or simply convenient. Truth always has to fight for a hearing, and is ever under attack. If your religious concepts are the same as the religious concepts in general, you can be sure that they are not the same as that taught in scripture, for the creeds and traditions of men have come to dominate the doctrines of most churches. The New Testament is a simple document, but to get to the basic truths one has to cut through the matted layers of tradition and lies, and in doing so he will be labeled a heretic, because of his rejection of “orthodoxy.” Paul had this problem when his teaching contradicted Judaism. He asked, “Am I become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16)

Proverbs 2:1-5 says that to attain wisdom and understanding you must “cry after discernment, and lift up thy voice for understanding... and search for her as for hid treasures.”

“Yea, with all thy getting, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7).

.....
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries.
Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute
Curtis’ articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article
for permission to be valid. Vol. XLIII, Number 2.
.....