



Berean Watchmen
Ministries

The Watchmen

A VOICE FROM THE WALL

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- Keeping Christmas
- Digging Deeper Conference 2012

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Theology Matters

Introduction

There is a growing movement within the confines of modern Christianity that would dare to suggest that our theology is in need of changing. It is suggested that the ways of the church fathers, or those of the early church, are in need of some revamping and slight modification to make it more palatable. In an effort to make everything relevant for the modern world, the tendency has been to abandon solid theology and be more encompassing and ecumenical in our mindset.

I must tell you that this is very concerning to me. The problem exists in that you cannot change truth, simply by changing our minds about it. I cannot simply re-label the colour 'green' to 'red', and from now on declare that red is green, and green is red. The honest truth of the matter exposes me as a rambling fool for thinking so. No matter how much I declare that wind is caused by trees flapping their branches, in the end, the truth exposes my folly.

So what is theology? And why is it important to have good theology?

Here is our statement of reason:

If there is a God, we'd better find out what He wants us to do, and do it...

Why Study Theology?

While there are several reasons to examine in answer to this question, this first one is the most important.

You're a Theologian Already

Theology isn't something that only exists in dusty old libraries of theological seminaries. The word theology comes from the Greek word *theologia* which comes from two words, *theos* meaning 'God', and *logos* meaning 'word'. Any time we use words to describe God, or if we even discuss God, we are in fact engaged in theology.

To put it plainly, we all believe in something about God and are therefore theologians in our own right. Of course the serious nature of this means that we need to be very sure that what we believe is correct.

We are at times careless in our pursuit of understanding who God is, and have casually said things like, "God to me is..." or "My God would never..."

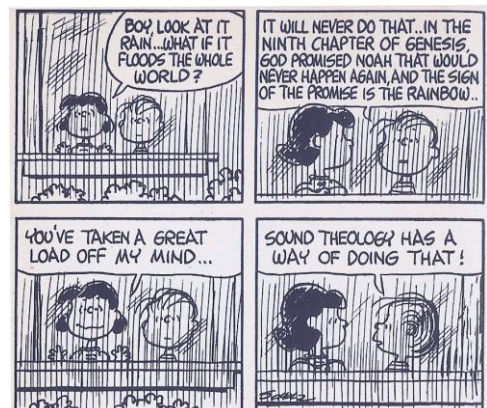
Great caution should be stressed here. For if we misrepresent God, then we have created a god that does not exist. That is to say, that we have created an idol - a god modeled after our own image - or a god that we are more comfortable with.

We need to be sure of what the Bible says about God, to ensure we are presenting the real, one and only God.

It Brings us Peace

If we can understand things like, "Why is the world the way it is?", "What is my Purpose in life?" or "What does the future hold?", we are left with a sense of comfort and peace. When we look at the world today, we can be comforted to know that an all knowing, all powerful, all loving, wise and merciful God is in control of everything. God is sovereign and so when troubles occur, or things have us worried, we can stop asking the question 'Why?' and start asking the more important question, 'What?' "What is it that you require of me Lord?" "What is it that you want me to learn or do?"

To help us understand this better I'll present this cartoon done by the great theologian (jesting of course) Charles M. Schulz.



While this cartoon might make us laugh, there is great truth revealed here. Theology can be our comfort and our peace.

Because we Love the Savior

Jesus said, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* (John 14:15) Our understanding of the commandments is directly linked to the reading, application and knowledge of the Bible. Our theology is based upon our understanding of Scripture and therefore the study of theology, or the quest for obtaining good theology, is a demonstration of that love.

Allow me to demonstrate this idea with another scenario.

When we were first falling in love with our spouses, we wanted to know everything about them and wanted to spend all our time with them. We did so, because as we grew in love with them, the things that they found important, those things that they enjoyed in life, soon became important to us.

Here now in the context of theology we are dealing with our risen Lord. We are contemplating the God who loved us so much that he died for us. We have His sixty-six love letters all bound together in one volume (the Bible) and yet we generally spend less time reading them than we do reading the newspaper, watching television, exercising, etc.

"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." - John 14:21

Like mining for gold, we can choose to haphazardly wade into the water and sift through the pebbles of a stream looking for gold dust. Or we can choose to pick up the tools, walk into a mine and after some hard labour find the nuggets that will change our lives.

Christ promised that He would love us and manifest Himself to us, if only we would love Him enough to keep his commandments. And by inference this means reading and keeping His Word.

So what are we 'wading' for?

Our Doctrine Determines How We Live

No one can deny that what we believe defines how we live our lives. If we believe that man is a created being, created in the image of God and is special in that creation, then we are less likely to casually take another's life. However, if our doctrine is that man is nothing more than an evolved animal then we ourselves will have a much lower view of each other, and not recognize how special we really are.

Mass murderer Jeffrey Dahmer, in an

interview on Dateline NBC in November of 1994 said, *"If a person doesn't think there is a God to be accountable to, then—then what's the point of trying to modify your behavior to keep it within acceptable ranges? That's how I thought anyway. I always believed the theory of evolution as truth, that we all just came from the slime. When we, when we died, you know, that was it, there is nothing..."*

By the grace of God, Mr. Dahmer died a Christian. Yes God saved Mr. Dahmer because he had repented and put his trust in Christ to save him. What Mr. Dahmer's words and actions proved without a doubt was that doctrine and how we are indoctrinated, are very serious and poignant talking points in how we rule our lives.

A simple and serious application of this point can be seen in our everyday lives. For example, if we believe something to be poisonous, we won't drink it.

In the application of theology, if we believe that God only speaks through His Word then you will study it diligently, however, if we believe that God continues to reveal, and speaks through feelings, and visions, then we will spend our time seeking emotional responses to our environments as "God moments". These two methods are drastic departures from each other in how an individual would ascertain God's will for their lives.

Our Discernment will be Sharpened

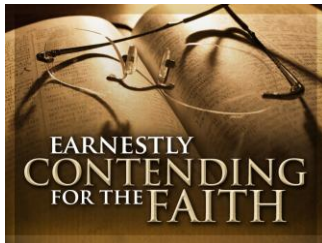
Jude warned, *"I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."* (Jude 1:3) In order to contend for this faith, it is evident that we have to know what it is. We are told to know and uphold the faith (doctrine and practice) that was *once for all* delivered to the saints.

Jude's letter was addressing an increase in bad doctrine and unsound theology that was creeping into the church. His letter serves as a general warning to 'earnestly contend for the faith' by studying God's Word. If we do not, we will never be able to discern truth from error.

Ready to Give an Answer

The study of the Bible and the systematic ordering of its doctrines and knowledge is the only way for us to adequately *"be ready to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you."* (1 Peter 3:15)

The Bible is sufficient for everything we need for our Christian faith and practice. It is the authority, and it is sufficient to answer the questions of any man.



"No one can deny that what we believe defines how we live our lives."

It has that power because it is in fact God breathed, and therefore holds the authority of the God who wrote it.

Systematic Theology

This fall I have been blessed and humbled to once again be teaching adult Sunday School at our local church. The topic we have chosen to talk about this session is the subject of Systematic Theology, and we've titled the class, "Theology Matters". It is the intent of the class to essentially address every portion of the doctrines of Christian faith in some way. I am hoping it will edify, encourage and strengthen all those who attend (and teach it).

The class looks at questions about systematic theology like: What is it? Does it have a biblical foundation? Should I build my theology around systems? And if so, how do I go about doing that? A more important question might even be, 'Would Jesus say that it's ok?' These questions are the beginning steps, but they are necessary to ensure we stay within the foundations of orthodoxy.

Systematic theology is essentially a process of developing, from the contents of Scripture, an orderly framework for understanding each of the subjects that the Bible teaches.

We need to systematically organize the information in the Bible because the Bible itself is not necessarily in an ordered fashion. For example the Bible is not presented as a chronological book, although it does have some portions of it that are. Likewise, if you read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation it seems to jump around a lot. Times, dates and even certain teachings show up in multiple places that need to be gathered and correlated to see the 'whole' picture.

The Bible is a gathering of 66 books with over 40 different authors over a period of approximately 1500 years. It was originally written in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek) and it contains over 40 different literary forms. The Bible contains poetry, history, proverbs, narratives, instruction, songs, letters, stories, parables, prayers, genealogies and prophecies. It is a very unique book and the point in all of this is simply to relay that the Bible is not a theology textbook. It is much more than that. God didn't reveal Scripture in a 'textbook' fashion and in that sense, the Bible could be considered 'messy'.

We're not really sure why God didn't reveal Scripture in a 'non-messy' fashion because the Bible doesn't really reveal the answer to us, but assuredly there must be a good reason because God chose to do it this

way. Perhaps indirectly this method creates for us more interest. Like a good puzzle we are led to *dig in* and *meditate* on the words more than we would a different book. Like a good puzzle, some parts come together very quickly and clearly, while other parts require us to work a little harder. I believe this process shows God as personal, involved, active and working in the world and our lives. Perhaps too, it is so that each of us – at whatever stage of our walk we are in – can read the same passages of Scripture and get exactly what we need at the moment. Anyone at any level can essentially read it, and likewise understand it.

"For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." - 1Co 14:33

"I rejoice at Your word As one who finds great treasure." – Psalms 119:162

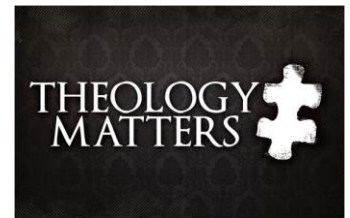
The stories are interesting, the material is unique. The study of *Theology* can be very rewarding, but honestly reading a textbook on it may somewhat overload and cause springs to pop out of our head. But the Bible, when approached with the understanding that it is God revealing Himself to us, keeps us interested in ways that no textbook on life or theology ever could.

Just because God didn't deliver the Bible in a systematized and organized framework should not mean that we cannot reason through the process (aided by the Holy Spirit) ourselves. The onus still remains on us to collate the teachings on subjects from all the assorted material passages in the Bible.

Why we are here? Why did God make us? Why did He save us? What's going on in the world? These are all questions answered when we imbed ourselves, or see ourselves imbedded in this broader story of redemption. This is what makes our faith personal. The portrayal of God's salvation plan from Creation, the Fall and then to salvation through Jesus Christ throughout the pages of Scripture tells the complete story in a more memorable and personal way.

Where to Begin?

To create an orderly framework to better and more clearly understand biblical doctrine we need to start where any good researcher would. Like a good detective, we need to gather all the facts, and then come up with the most logical conclusions that the evidence would lead us to. We must collect all the biblical material on any given subject and as we arrange the results, we can draw principles from the material. If



"We must collect all the biblical material on any given subject and as we arrange the results, we can draw principals from the material"

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Thanks to Lara Law (See Exodus 20:1-21) 08-14-2002
 HONOR THY FATHER AND KILL? THOU SHALT
 NOT TAKE THE NAME OF GRAVEN IMAGES? ...
 MAN, THIS JUST CAN'T BE RIGHT

we look at the Bible as a collection of evidence, we can then organize the evidence under headings based on the subjects that come from our exegesis of those passages. All the pieces of the puzzle eventually provide the big picture. Each thread of Scripture provides the complete picture of the tapestry when methodically put together.

Great care and attention needs to be given during this process and we need to be consistent in our reasoning. All kinds of wild doctrines can be extrapolated out of the Bible by carelessly ignoring one verse, or perhaps taking it out of context. Context is a very important aspect of biblical study and it needs to be addressed before we continue.

Take for example, John 3:16.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” – John 3:16

If we are truly seeking the meaning of this passage we have to look at the first word and ask the question, “What’s the ‘for’ for?”

The ‘for’ drives us back further in the chapter, perhaps to verse 15 or even 14 to give us a better understanding, or rather a correct understanding of what the verse really means. The content of verse 16 is important, but proper understanding can only be derived if we look to the passages surrounding it to ascertain the true meaning.

Another example of contextual importance is when we look at a verse like Revelation 3:20.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” - Rev 3:20

Many people use this passage as an ‘altar call’ unto salvation. They infer that Jesus stands at the unbeliever’s heart knocking at the door. I am sure we have all heard this passage used in this way. I myself have heard it many times in witnessing encounters.

The trouble really is context. If we examine the surrounding passages we quickly find out that this verse is not talking about salvation at all. Rather this verse is talking directly to the Church. It is a call to repentance, as we can see from the passages immediately following, with direct indication of the hearer of the declaration found in verse 22, “... let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Now I don’t think we can say using Revelation 3:20 in our witnessing

encounters is completely wrong, but the argument can be made that it is not completely correct either. The real power in the Word of God is when we read and apply it within the context it was intended. There are many other verses we can utilize, that are indeed ‘salvation verses’, so we do not need to contextually misapply verses from other portions of Scripture.

A Better Understanding

The greatest benefit of Systematic Theology is that it gives us a better understanding of what God wanted us to know on a certain subject.

For instance, the Doctrine of Soteriology. The word soteriology comes from two Greek terms, namely *soter* meaning ‘savior’ or ‘deliverer’ and *logos* meaning ‘word’, ‘matter’, or ‘thing’. In Christianity it is used to refer to the study of the biblical doctrine of salvation.

The doctrine of salvation is incredibly important because if we don’t have the correct understanding of salvation, we cannot possibly be saved. We need to know what salvation is in order to come out from under God’s wrath and enjoy God’s presence forever. As we have been discussing in the previous paragraphs, we know that we are not necessarily going to get a good understanding on a given subject from just one verse. We need to be presented with a broader picture which can only be done through the studying of all relevant verses on the subject and putting them all together in a systematic way.

Going back to our example of John 3:16; while this is indeed a salvation verse, is it really all we need to know for salvation? What about:

- Romans 6:23
- Hebrews 9:27
- 1 John 9:10
- Colossians 2:113-14
- Mark 1:14-15
- Romans 3:23-25
- John 3:14-15
- John 14:6
- Ephesians 2:8-9.
- Exodus 20
- Numbers 21:8-9
- Romans 10:9

I would suggest to you that all of these verses tie into the understanding of soteriology. Although this is only a sampling of the verses in reference to salvation, each one contributes to the doctrine as a whole and interestingly enough the doctrine as a whole now gives more understanding to each individual verse as well. It is a spiral of knowledge.

“If we examine the surrounding passages we quickly find out that this verse is not talking about salvation at all”

Prolegomena

With the example of soteriology before us, we need to back up for a minute and look at an important aspect of our quest for theological knowledge. Before you can begin systematically organizing doctrines of the Bible, there are some presuppositions that we need to have. A presupposition, or *prolegomenon* as the theologians say, is our pre-understandings or commitments that we have made in our heart and mind about the subject we are about to learn or study. Everyone has presuppositions, even if we haven't explicitly outlined them.

One blatant example is the *Theory of Evolution* and how prevalent it is in our society. The presupposition that most people now have is that science has proven evolution. Nothing could be further from the truth. The reason we are raised in our school systems to believe evolution is because of the damaging presuppositions of the current and past evolutionary scientists.

"Evolution is unproved and unprovable. We believe it only because the only alternative is special creation which is unthinkable" – Arthur Keith (Scottish anatomist and anthologist)

Mr. Keith does not stand alone in this belief. When you analyze the writings and works of the evolutionary proponents, they all reveal the presupposition that there is no special creation. Regardless now of what the evidence says before them, they will still refuse to see *'the forest for the trees'*.

The Greatest Blunder

During the Great Depression, an astronomer named Edwin Hubble made an astounding discovery. Using his 100 inch telescope at Mt. Wilson in California, Edwin discovered other galaxies far beyond our own. This discovery forced humanity to realize that the Universe was far larger than ever imagined. By carefully observing these galaxies, Edwin Hubble then made an even more astounding observation. In 1929, Edwin Hubble announced that almost all galaxies appeared to be moving away from us. In fact, he found that the universe was expanding - with all of the galaxies moving away from each other. This phenomenon was observed as a redshift of a galaxy's spectrum. This redshift appeared to be larger for faint, presumably farther, galaxies. Hence, the farther a galaxy, the faster it is receding from the Earth.

What this meant to a shocked scientific community was that the Universe was not static, and the evidence suggested therefore that it was also not eternal. The galaxies Hubble observed from the top of

Mount Wilson told a story never conceived, described or predicted by any scientist or astronomer. Well, perhaps except one.

Previous to Hubble's discovery, a young Albert Einstein while working through his equations and theory of general relativity had discovered through his equations that the Universe was expanding. When Einstein first realized that the solution to his equations on general relativity, subject to the constraints of the cosmological principle led to universes that were not static, he was dismayed. Regardless of what the equations revealed, Einstein had presupposed that the Universe had to be static. To get a static Universe, Einstein added an artificial term to his field equations that stabilized the Universe against expansion or contraction. This term has come to be known as the *cosmological constant* or the *vacuum energy density*.

After Hubble's discovery was published, however, Albert Einstein abandoned his work on the cosmological constant. He later termed this portion of work his "greatest blunder" since it was his incorrect presumption of a static universe that had caused him to fail to accept what could be seen in his concepts and equations of general relativity.

Einstein made a famous trip to Mount Wilson in 1931 to thank Hubble for providing the observational basis for modern cosmology

It is the opinion of this writer that many of the world's scientists are themselves creating what will one day be called the 'greatest of blunders' by assuming that there is no *special creation*.

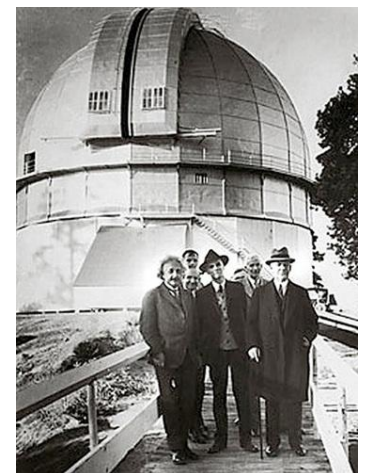
A 2008 documentary titled, *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* takes a hard look at the phenomenon in our present culture of those scientists who are discovering evidences for intelligent design, and are being shunned and silenced by their international peers for suggesting such a thing. I would encourage all of our readers to obtain a copy of this video and watch it with their friends and family. The film which is hosted by Ben Stein is a potent reminder of the dangers of presuppositions, and the defiance of man against God as declared in Romans chapter one.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,

"Evolution is unproved and unprovable,"



Albert Einstein and Edwin Hubble



Einstein's visit to Mt. Wilson in 1931

“A presupposition must be mutually known or assumed by both the speaker and the hearer”

even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools... who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” – Romans 1:18-22,25 (emphasis mine)

Our Prolegomena

Now that we’ve looked at the importance of recognizing the existence of Prolegomena (Presuppositions), we need to set the framework for our study of the Bible.

While the examples I have cited in previous paragraphs were for the most part negative, our prolegomena can in fact be helpful in many cases during discussion and everyday interaction. A presupposition must be mutually known or assumed by both the speaker and the hearer in order for the words to be considered appropriate in the context of the discussion.

For the purposes of Systematic Theology I would suggest the following are our starting Prolegomena.

1. **The Authority of the Bible** - the Bible is absolutely authoritative in what it teaches to us. (We do not seek to master the Bible, we seek to be mastered by it)
2. **The Bible is Unified** – It comes from the mind of a SINGLE god – the Christian God. It is God’s very Word and God breathed. It is His Word, and therefore we draw the conclusion that it is unified, and not indecisive. If God wrote it, then it can’t contradict, and the teachings and secrets revealed within must be unified. This leads into our third prolegomenon;
3. **The Coherence of Scripture** - If Scripture is a reflection of the divine mind and God doesn’t lie, then there will be a coherence within the teachings of Scripture. Where the Bible teaches on any given subject there will be an expected consistency in the teachings.



What Would Jesus Do?

The reader may remember that we asked the question earlier about whether Jesus would approve of systematically arranging Scripture into doctrines of theology.

The fact is that Jesus himself demonstrated this very process and nowhere more prevalently than in Luke 24:13-45.

In this passage Christ appeared to two disciples as they travelled down the road to Emmaus. The setting was the day of the Resurrection – the tomb was empty, and these two men were discussing the events over the last couple of days. Jesus was not recognized by the men, and He joined in on their conversation. When the two disciples (one of them Cleopas) express confusion and shock about the transpired events, Christ says, **“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!”** (vs 25) He then, beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, expounded to them through all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. In other words, Jesus gave these two men a systematic walk through where Christ was revealed throughout Scripture. Jesus himself used systematic methods to show them theology they had not completely understood before.

Later on that day Christ appeared again to all the disciples while they were meeting together. Prior to delivering to them what is considered to be the Great Commission, Christ expounds, **“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.”** (Luke 24:44) Notice here the listing of the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms. To the hearers this constituted the entire known and revealed Bible. Verse 45 then continues, **“And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.”**

It is very clear from these passages that the methodology and means by which Christ expounded on the Scriptures was exactly that of *Systematic Theology*. Prior to Jesus systematically showing them and opening their minds, they didn’t really understand the full meaning of the Bible. When it was revealed to them all of the pieces began to fall together more clearly. Their understanding became more complete and more to the *true* teaching of God’s Word. At the end of the day they could all confidently declare, **“Ah! You are the Christ! You are the One! And You are what the Bible is all about!”**

I can imagine there were amazing things that Christ revealed to them on that day, and I’m sure even our own study of these same Scriptures would only provide a sampling of what was revealed that day.

Theology Matters

Are you ready to give an answer to every man of the hope that is within you? Perhaps some of us are not as ready as we once thought. Through the study of theology and systematically arranging it in

an orderly framework I myself have become better equipped to share my faith, to share Christ and to speak light into an ever darkening world. If we take the time to organize our theology systematically in accordance with truth, we will be more able to concisely and clearly explain to others who Christ is, and what we believe. To encourage our study and perseverance in truth I would suggest that Systematic theology is *“Trying to create an orderly framework from Scripture to better*

understand the mind of God on a subject, so that we can better present Jesus.”²

And that is a most noble and worthy cause.

- J.R. Hall


References:

1. *Drive By Theology* audio series co-hosted by Pastor R.W. Glen and Todd Friel available from WretchedRadio.com
2. Todd Friel from the *Drive By Theology* series co-hosted with pastor R.W. Glen and available from WretchedRadio.com


digging deeper

THE 6TH ANNUAL SASKATOON BIBLE CONFERENCE 2012


Erindale Alliance Church, 310 Perehudoff Cr, Saskatoon, SK, Canada



Tim Challies
Grace Fellowship Church




Rev. Robin Haensel
Erindale Alliance Church




Dr. T.V. Thomas
Centre for Evangelism & World Mission

DISCUSSIONS INCLUDE:


- BOLDLY PROCLAIMING
- THE GREAT COMMISSION
- LIVING A DEEPER LIFE
- HOPE IN TROUBLED TIMES
- THE CREATION FOUNDATION
- THE GARDEN TO THE CROSS
- THE RESURRECTION AND ITS MEANING
- AND MUCH MORE...



J.R. Hall
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Louis Voyer
Christian Transportation Ministries



John Feakes
C.A.R.E. Ministries of Winnipeg


For Information and to Register:

www.diggingdeeper.ca

(306) 649-4202

* Attendance is Free

March 16, 17 18, 2012



Berean Watchmen Ministries

Why We Love Scrooge

“It makes us feel good inside to watch this once wretched and despised man become happy, joyous and loved.”

For many of us the Christmas season brings many family traditions to life. After almost a year of slumber we start bringing forth various trinkets, and decorations and we begin to bombard our senses with those things that can undeniably and only mean - Christmas.

In the early days of my childhood Christmas in our home was quite simple by modern standards. My father was fresh out of university and my mom stayed home raising us kids. There wasn't much about us that the world would consider to be 'rich'. I clearly remember one Christmas where my mom would spend her nights sewing a strange brownish-red, corduroy house coat. Our home was very small, and she would sit in her bedroom sewing. I asked her what she was making and she said something for my cousin. I then asked why there was a 'J' stitched on the pocket. She turned and smiled at me and simply stated, "It stands for Jammies" which I accepted as a reasonable explanation. I know what you're thinking, but to a young 8 year old 'J' for pajamas was a viable explanation for the golden 'J'. Christmas morning I opened my gifts and low and behold there was a brownish-red, corduroy housecoat with a hand stitched 'J' on the pocket. It didn't take me long to realize that I had been tricked, and that I had been night after night witnessing my mother's love for me as she sewed. (The reader will be happy to know that I did eventually begin to trust her again.)

In all actuality I must confess that I cherished that housecoat and I literally wore it out, having long outgrown it before I stopped wearing it. Money you say? Nope. But we were rich – actually richer than I thought at the time.

We've come a long way since those early days, but the simple traditions we established back then carried forward throughout the years. Some of those traditions I have now passed on to my own family.

One such tradition occurs on Christmas Eve. Essentially we make every kind of

Hors d'oeuvre and finger-food that you can imagine and we devour plates full of them while watching 'A Christmas Carol'; the timeless classic which tells the tale of Ebenezer Scrooge – a grumpy old miser who receives a new chance at life on Christmas Eve. He is offered this chance by his old dead partner Jacob Marley and is visited by three more ghosts that night. Each ghost brings Scrooge face to face with elements of his life that he becomes increasingly ashamed of, and therefore increasingly repentant of. The night culminates with the last ghost who is described as a ghastly figure (imagine the grim reaper) who brings Scrooge face to face with his own tombstone at some point in Christmas future. Scrooge cries out,

“Spirit! Hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been... I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!” A Christmas Carol, Charles Dickens, pg 277

It is, without question, a somber and repentant scene.

We love the morning after scene where Scrooge with his 'transformed life' bustles around spreading cheer and merriment all to the surprise of those who knew the old man, the old Scrooge. The scene plays out as Scrooge, in a sense, has been born again anew. He then goes out of his way to surprise and bless those he knows in sort of a redemptive offering for past sins.

It makes us feel good inside to watch this once wretched and despised man become happy, joyous and loved. We laugh and a tear wells in our eye at the look of surprise and joy he spreads wherever he goes.

However, with all of this merriment, I have to reflect on the real story of Christmas, of what the Christ Child brought to earth and what *“honouring*



George C. Scott as Ebenezer Scrooge

Christmas in my heart” might honestly mean. The story and purpose of Christ isn’t really clearly stated within the story of Scrooge. Perhaps the *true* idea behind Christmas appears in a type and shadow, but not in a way that brings real, honest meaning to Christmas. From a secular viewpoint it may be so with *“Peace on earth and Goodwill to all men”*, but not from a truly Biblical standpoint. (Although the phrase is in fact taken from Scripture. cf. Luke 2:14)

The Bible tells us that like Scrooge, all of us are in a wretched state before God. We don’t like to hear this part of the story, but inwardly the unregenerate man is in fact Ebenezer Scrooge at heart. We are wretched, selfish, wicked and no matter how good we think we are, we are unrighteous before God.

“As it is written: “there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after god. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.” - Romans 3:10-12

“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;” - Isaiah 64:6

The problem is that the unregenerate man does not recognize this state. We believe in our hearts that we are inherently good, and we trust in our hearts that this is so. But the Bible says,

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” - Jeremiah 17:9

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” - Mat 15:19

We in a sense require the visitation by ghosts of our own. Not in the literal sense, but like the ghosts to Ebenezer Scrooge, the Law of God exposes our lives, and intents of our hearts, for what they really are.

“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will

be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” – Romans 3:19-20

The Law of God exposes our sin. It stops our self-righteous mouths and we realize that our position before a holy and just God is dire indeed – we are all *guilty before God*. Like Scrooge we recognize before God and by the law that we are in fact a wretched being. Is this not why Paul cries out,

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” - Romans 7:24

The Bible clearly states what the punishment for sin is.

“For the wages of sin is death...” – Romans 6:23

And it affirms,

“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,” – Heb. 9:27

One day upon our death we will have to stand in judgment before a holy and just creator. When we stand before God on that day, we would all stand guilty.

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” - Rom 3:23

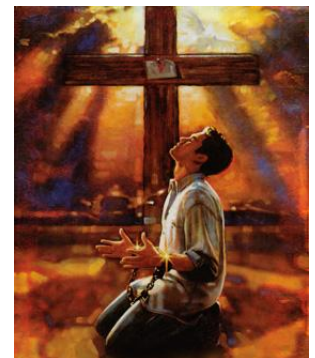
The law of God condemns us.

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” – Galatians 5:19-21

We cannot enter the kingdom of God and Ephesians 2:2 tells us that we are *children of wrath*. Revelation 21:8 issues our sentence and declares we will have our part in the *Lake of Fire*.

However! Praise God that He - this same God who is holy, just and righteous - is also rich in mercy, grace and loving-kindness.

“The Law of God exposes our sin. It stops our self-righteous mouths and we realize that our position before a holy and just God is dire indeed.”



"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." - Rom 5:8

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" - Eph. 2:4-5

This was the meaning of the message the angel declared on that first Christmas night when he said,

"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." - Luke 2:10-11

This was the Christ; He whom Isaiah declared, *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."* (Isaiah 7:14)

This Immanuel - the one of whom John the Baptist would later cry out, *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* had a grand purpose in God's eternal plan. This Christ child whose purpose was declared to Joseph, *"He will save His people from their sins."* (cf Matt 1:21) is the true reason for reflection, celebration, wonder, awe and worship at Christmas.

We know from God's Word that Christ came as a final redemptive sacrifice for all those who would respond. As a propitiation for our sins, at the cross Jesus Christ paid the punishment for our violation of God's law.

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." - 1John 4:10 (see also Romans 3:25)

The proper response to salvation by Christ is clearly spoken in Scripture. By *repentance* and *faith* in Him, we can indeed be saved.

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." - Mark 1:14-15

By repenting of our sin, and trusting the Lord Jesus to save us, we cast off our old man, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Romans 13:14) and we now war against the carnal man within us in response to the awesome mercy that God afforded to us.

With our own tombstone in view and the cold icy hand of death pointed toward it we, like Scrooge, utter our repentant cry.

'Hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been... I will honour Christ in my heart, and try to keep Him throughout the year. I will live in remembrance of Him in the Past, the Present and the Future. The Holy Spirit shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons He teaches. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!'

(For a truly wonderful prayer of repentance I urge the reader to read through Psalm 51 at your earliest convenience)

When we turn to Christ in repentance and faith God gives us a new heart, with new desires (cf. Ezekiel 36:26), and we are regenerated within.

"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins," - Eph. 2:1

"Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."" - John 3:3

We now move from death to life and the wrath of God no longer abides on us because it was paid in full by the shedding of Christ's blood.

"and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." - 1Thess. 1:10

"For God did not appoint us [Christians] to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ," - 1Thess. 5:9 [notes mine]

Like Ebenezer Scrooge our old life is dead, and our new life through Christ is what shines through.

"For I through the law died to the law

"When we turn to Christ in repentance and faith God gives us a new heart, with new desires."



that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. – Galatians 2:19-20

I desperately urge each of us to ensure that we have the Gospel of Christ on our lips throughout this holiday season. Secular tradition and secular reasons have all but erased the meaning of Christmas from the world around us.

We Christians are charged with the preaching of the gospel unto every creature (cf. Mark 16:15). Romans 10 declares, "Whoever call's on the name of the Lord shall be saved", and it goes on to say, "how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?"

And who are they that are sent?

"As you sent Me [Christ] into the world, I also have sent them into the world." – John 17:18

No wonder Paul reminds us:

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" – Romans 10:15

Did you catch that? Peace and glad tidings of good things. Somehow, somewhere, that sounds so familiar.

"Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy which will be to all people... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" – Luke 2:10-14

Merry Christmas to all of you. May God encourage and keep you this season. And may your feet carry the glad tidings of great joy as you continue to serve the King.

- J.R. Hall



Wise men still seek Him



Merry Christmas

&

Happy New Year !

From all of us at



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*"...Now these [Bereans] were more noble... in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so."
- Acts 17:10-11*

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Questions and Answers

Why my Faith can't be shaken

A two-year-old boy was once staring at a heater, fascinated by its bright orange glow. His father saw him and warned, "Don't touch that heater, son. It may look pretty, but it's hot." The little boy believed him, and moved away from the heater. Some time later, after his father had left the room, the boy thought, "I wonder if it really is hot." He then reached out to touch it and see for himself. The second his flesh burned, he stopped believing it was hot; he now knew it was hot! He had moved out of the realm of belief into the realm of experience.

Christians believed in God's existence before their conversion. However, when they obeyed the Word of God, turned from their sins, and embraced Jesus Christ, they stopped merely believing. The moment they reached out and touched the heater bar of God's mercy, they moved out of belief into the realm of experience. This experience is so radical, Jesus referred to it as being "born again." The Bible says that those who don't know God are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1; 4:18). We are born with physical life, but not spiritual life. Picture unbelievers as corpses walking

around who, by repenting and placing their faith in Christ, receive His very life. There is a radical difference between a corpse and a living, breathing human, just as there is when sinners pass from spiritual death to life. The apostle Paul said if you are "in Christ," you are a brand new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Those who now have God's Spirit living in them will love what He loves and desire to do His will; they will have a hunger for His Word, a love for other believers, and a burden for the lost. The Holy Spirit also confirms in their spirit that they are now children of God (Romans 8:16). Those who believe on the name of the Son of God can know that they have eternal life (1 John 5:12,13).

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, "My speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4,5). What Paul was saying was, "I deliberately didn't talk you into your faith, but I let God's power transform you."

He didn't reach them through an intellectual assent, but through the realm of personal experience.

Suppose two people—a heater manufacturer and a skin specialist—walked into the room just after that child had burned his hand on the heater. Both assured the boy that he couldn't possibly have been burned. But all the experts, theories, and arguments in the world will not dissuade that boy, because of his experience. Those who have been transformed by God's power need never fear scientific or other arguments, because the man with an experience is not at the mercy of a man with an argument. "For our gospel came not to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance . . ." (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Answer provided from the Evidence Bible "100 Common Questions and Objections". Published by Living Waters.

Overheard

"A Pharisee is hard on others and easy on himself, but a spiritual man is easy on others and hard on himself."

- A.W. Tozer

Upcoming Events...

Christian Faith in 2011?

November 20th, 2011
Erindale Alliance Church,
Saskatoon, SK, Canada

A seminar series with Andy Bannister of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (www.RZIM.org).

Topics:

- Let's Talk about Tough Questions

- Grasping the Depths of the Gospel
- Biblical Mandate for Apologetics

For more information contact:
Local Event Contact - Loren Regier - 306-934-0796

Erindale Alliance Church Office -
306-249-3393

<http://www.erindalealliance.ca>

Digging Deeper 2012

March 16, 17 and 18th, 2012
Erindale Alliance Church,
Saskatoon, SK, Canada

Speakers: T.V. Thomas, Tim Challies, Louis Voyer, Robin Haensel, John Feakes, J.R. Hall

Topics:

- Boldly proclaiming
- The Great Commission
- Living a Deeper Life

- Hope in Troubled Times
- The Creation Foundation
- Consider the Cross
- And much more!

Go to:

www.DiggingDeeper.ca