

CONCLUDING MEDITATION

WHY STUDY THIS BOOK?

1. LOOKING AT THEM, LOOKING AT US

a. Their situation

- (1) They had been under the covenant of the Law of Moses.
- (2) They had been raised in and had lived in the Jewish culture with its close ties to the old covenant.
- (3) They were being persecuted for becoming Christians, and pressured to return to their old lives.

b. Our situation

- (1) We have never been under the covenant of the Law of Moses.
- (2) Most of us know next-to-nothing about Jewish customs and culture.
- (3) Aside from occasional awkwardness or mild ridicule, we are not being persecuted.
- (4) There is no way we can go back to a former covenant, because there is not one available to us!

2. SO WHAT?

a. What did we gain by studying the situation in which Jewish Christians lived just before 70 AD?

- (1) We were able to see how foolish they might have been to return to the old covenant.
- (2) We were able to get an appreciation for the way the priesthood, the covenant, the household of God and all the arrangements between God and His people were fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ ... etc.
- (3) But other than these somewhat academic, conceptual matters ... **so what?**

b. How might what we have studied during this quarter change us, individually and collectively?

3. "YOU SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES, FOR IN THEM YOU THINK YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE ..."

a. Considering Romans 3:21-24, what was and is the "problem" which had to be solved by Jesus's sacrifice?

- (1) Was the Law of Moses the problem? Could **another** system of law, one which we might call "the law of Christ," solve that problem, so that the solution to the problem Paul presents entailed legal justification for salvation?
- (2) How can Paul claim, "There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned"? Gentiles to whom he wrote had never been under the Law of Moses; how could that law be their problem, or our problem?
- (3) Paul's argument in Romans 1-3 is this: "You pick any legal standard you want—a law given by God or even a law that you made up out of your own conscience—and I will prove you guilty as a sinner under that law."
- (4) How could a law which came through Christ pose **less** of a legal hurdle than a law which came through angels?

b. "You have heard that it was said ..."

- (1) To this question: "What is the **difference** between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ?"
- (2) Is this our answer: "Under the Law of Moses there was no way for forgiveness of sins to be obtained"?
- (3) Does that answer imply that there is a "Law of Christ" under which there **is** a way for forgiveness of sins to be obtained, by meeting a legal standard of perfection?

- (4) If a “legalist” is “someone who believes that perfect conformity to law is necessary for salvation in Christ ...”
- (5) ... do we feel that it is good to be a legalist ... even, that it is **necessary** to be a legalist?
- (6) Is it our position that we must meet the standards of the law of God in order to be saved in Christ?

4. “GOING BACK” IS NOT THE ONLY WAY OF “GOING WRONG”

a. Let us agree that we ought to be pursuing the following goals:

- (1) Restoration of New Testament Christianity
 - (a) To the extent that it **is possible and sensible**, given the great differences between the culture of the Mediterranean world in the First Century and the culture of the USA in the 21st century ...
 - (b) ... to the extent that **it is not counterproductive**, in that we defeat ourselves by trying to imitate non-material aspects of 1st-century Christianity which are in fact used to divide and distract us.
 - (c) The Body of Christ in our time and place ought to be an instrument of service and revolution the way the Body of Christ in the 1st-century Mediterranean world was.
- (2) Making our faith a working faith
 - (a) It is as true for us as it was for Jewish Christians to whom James wrote that “faith without works is dead.”
 - (b) A “great salvation” such as the one in which we participate ought to produce “great works.”
- (3) Reaching fuller understanding of our relationship to God, and separation from erroneous doctrines
 - (a) Growth in sanctification ought to produce growth in knowledge.
 - (b) Greater knowledge ought to give us more profound insight into the “meat” of Christian doctrine.
 - (c) We ought to be united our understanding of the deep things of Christ, and in our opposition to clearly erroneous doctrines.
- (4) Showing in thought, word and, especially, action proper gratitude for the gift of salvation by grace
 - (a) Our study and meditation should produce a deeper consciousness of how much has been done for us.
 - (b) That depth of understanding ought to generate a thanksgiving of greater works.
- (5) Finding the safest position on doctrine and practice that we can
 - (a) As our knowledge deepens, we come to recognize subtle dangers in certain ideas and practices.
 - (b) Reading the warnings against apostasy in Hebrews, we want to keep as far away from danger as possible.

b. Must we pursue these goals in a way that entangles us in a legalistic approach to our covenant with God?

- (1) As restorationists, do we replace the person of Jesus Christ with a system of organization, work and worship?
- (2) Do we remember that works result from saving faith, or do works become the means of our salvation?
- (3) In pursuit of deeper understanding and wisdom, do we pick certain doctrines to construct a “checklist of soundness” which we then intentionally use to justify ourselves by condemning other believers?
- (4) Does gratitude for the gift of salvation make us think that we can and must give something of value in return?
- (5) Are we so determined to find security in a “safe” position, a “safe” organization, a “safe” way of working, that, ultimately, we think as little as possible and do as little as possible so that we risk as little as possible?

c. Some things to consider

- (1) Do we have a right to make laws where God did not make them, “just to be safe”?
- (2) Should we search for something that we can do which will add value to the atonement made by Jesus?
- (3) Is it acceptable to turn good traditions and good practices into “standards” which we require of everyone?
- (4) Does it build up the body of Christ to look for ways to divide ourselves from other baptized believers?
- (5) Does “growing in grace and knowledge” mean that I justify myself by scorning the knowledge of others?
- (6) Does the discourse concerning the Hebrews lead me to believe that I can rely upon myself to save myself?