

Seeking God Through His Word

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But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition, reject. Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself. When I shall send Artemas unto thee or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis for I have determined there to winter. Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently that nothing be wanting unto them and let ours, I think if I remember my Bible, this is the only place in the New Testament this occurs. Ours, let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they may not unfruitful. All that are with me salute thee. Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.

He said, avoid foolish questions and genealogies and contentions and strivings about the law. There used to be a very fine writer who wrote for the Chicago Daily News. It was syndicated, but we had it here in the Chicago Daily News. I think he had gotten his start with the News. His name was Howard O'Brien, H.V. O'Brien. He was also a critic, literary and theatrical critic. He was a man of the world. He was a very fine man. He was kind. One time, a show came to the city called Lysistrata. Written as I remember by Aristophanes, the old Greek writer. And I didn't go to see it of course. I haven't seen a show since I was converted as I remember ever. I don't even believe in them in church to say nothing of going to theater to see them.

But O'Brien started out his criticism of this play, Lysistrata, by saying this. I don't remember anything else he said, but I do remember this. He said it is rather depressing to go and see Lysistrata and learn that nobody has thought of a new joke in 3000 years. They were still rehashing the same old jokes that Aristophanes had thought up, if he thought them back there nearly 1000 years, several hundred years before Christ.

Now, I thought of that when I hear these words of Paul, avoid foolish questions. It is rather depressing to know that people haven't mended their ways any in 2000 years. Paul wrote this nearly 1900 years ago, and we still have these people with us. Human nature hasn't changed. Nothing's been able to change human nature, nothing except the grace of God. The problems of debate and argument are still with us.

Our brother Knight and I were discussing religious journalism. And we rather agreed that a great many magazines are running, and running well, by the simple gadget of introducing argumentative articles; to raise contention and get people arguing and writing in angry letters and then subscribing in order to read what else there might be. But it's simply foolish questions.

They're to a large extent genealogies and contentions and strivings about the law. We have them today. Churches are filled with them. I think we have a minimum here, but I would not be so naive as to think we don't have any. He said avoid foolish questions. That is, he didn't say, avoid asking foolish questions. That's not what the word question means, but it's proposition, something to debate. That's what the word question means, and genealogies then he said.

Now the Jews had the biblical records, and those biblical records were very important to them; very important to you and me. Because, when the Messiah came, He had to be born of the seed of Abraham. But not only of Abraham, He had to be born of Isaac. For in Isaac shall thy seed befall. Not only Isaac, but He had to come through Jacob. And not only Jacob, but He had to come through, what was that son of Jacob, and then on down through David and on down the line. The genealogies were very important. God was keeping Israel separated, and they had to have their family tree, their records. Talk about birth certificates. We think that this is a modern invention, and that there are people now living that didn't have birth certificates when they were born. I didn't. I had to have my father after I became a grown man. I had my father swear to the fact that I'd been born. And he did and had it notarized.

But birth certificates were issued back in the days of the fathers, way back there. I don't know that they handed them to you, but they put your record down. For instance, the sons of Joseph after their families were Manasseh and Ephraim. Of the sons of Manasseh: of Machir, the family of the Machirites: and Machir begat Gilead: of Gilead come the family of the Gileadites. These are the sons of Gilead. And so on down the line, page after page after page of these genealogies. They had to be there so that when a man came saying, I am Christ, they could go to the records and see whether he could prove that he came of the seed of David, and of the seed of Nathan, not Solomon, and of the seed of Jacob and Isaac and Abraham. So they were very important.

But you know, religious people can't let things alone. So, the Jews abuse these genealogies. In order to give them something to do, they began to work with them, and give meanings never intended. Count the letters and then use them for puzzles sort of, and crossword puzzles and work on them and supply fanciful interpretations and turn them into allegory. Abraham begat Isaac begat Jacob. And Jacob begat Ephraim. Now, what does that mean in its deeper meaning? So, they went deeper and they found by counting the letters Abraham, and then the letters Jacob, and subtracting and adding, they managed to get some kind of a weird old wife's tale going about these genealogies. And one brother said, this had eaten the heart out of Judaism. It had eaten the heart out of Judaism. It was this kind of thing Christ fought when He appeared.

Now, the Talmud had encouraged that. The Talmud is you know, was a commentary several times bigger than the Bible itself, a commentary on the Bible, written by the rabbis. It had it start, oh, maybe the time of Ezra, and finished along maybe 400 or 500 A.D., and they still have it. I have read, I've not, I can't say I've read the Talmud, but I can say, I have read in the Talmud. I've

examined it and searched into it to see how, what it means when he says these genealogies and foolish questions.

Well, they're unprofitable and vain. And always they are the proof of a juvenile mind. I remember when I was a young preacher, I was walking through, past the town square in a little town in West Virginia. And here, gathered sitting around chewing tobacco and spitting on the sidewalk, whittling, were a group of old patriarchs. And they saw me and knew I was a minister. And so, they thumbed me over, come over here. I went over. And they propounded to me this question. They said, Reverend, would you give us an answer to this question? What is man?

Well, of course I didn't give them an answer. I said the first thing like Truman usually does that popped in my head. And I said, oh, man's a two-legged animal and turned my back. And as I left, they said, well, God's a two-legged animal for he made man in His image. And of course, both my answer and their parting shot were too foolish to be recorded. But they spent their lifetime, now here they were old, bearded and bald fellows, ready soon to die; and to be called before the Judge of all the earth, to give an account of the deeds done in the body. And it was either heaven or hell for them.

And they sat around and chewed and smoked and whittled and argued endlessly over the question, What is man? And you know, that question, they say, that's Biblical. David said, what is man? But do you notice how David worded it? David said, what is man that Thou art mindful of him? He said, O God, who am I that you should love me? What a difference? What a difference, careless men who have no thought of God, sitting around arguing on the technical question, what is man and the loving, reverent worshipful man looking at the stars and say, what is man that Thou shouldst love him? All the difference in the world? For David was not propounding a shallow philosophical question. He was exclaiming, O God, how could you love me?

Well, the juvenile mind is always ready. No matter what kind of head it's in, and I apologize to all serious-minded young people when I say the juvenile mind. The fact that you're juvenile in years doesn't mean you need to be infantile in your mentality. A lot of young people are mighty serious-minded, so I am not reflecting on being a juvenile. Everybody is at some time. We older folk may have a twinge of jealousy we're not still so young. But the point is the juvenile man, the careless, irresponsible mind, I mean, and a shallow religious curiosity, springing out of a basic moral insincerity.

The more I study the human scene and read the Word and pray, the more I am convinced that one thing everybody has to have, that will ever get converted, is sincerity. You may be so sinful; it may be as black as the blackest pit of hell. He may be as corrupt as a maggot infested pool. But if he's sincere five minutes in the presence of God, he can be delivered.

There isn't anything the blood of Jesus Christ can't cleanse from. There isn't anything God won't forgive. It's insincerity that curses mankind. And these people with their foolish questions in genealogy, simply were basically insincere. And God can't save a man no matter if he's a man of high morals. God can't save him if he's insincere. And no matter how deep a man is, I repeat, if a man is sincere and looks to Jesus Christ to can be converted.

Now, there's only one motive, one motive that God approves or accepts. There's only one motive for approaching the Scriptures. And I will break that motive down into four, though it's really one. The motive is to seek reverently to discover the will of God, to seek holiness of heart and life, to seek to know Christ intimately, and to learn how to instruct others to do the same.

That's the only reason, the only reason I have for going to the Scriptures. If I go to the Scriptures to try to find the Sputnik, I am guilty of foolish and unprofitable questions which can only be vain at last. If I go to the Bible to find, with reverence and prayer, how I can do the will of God and be holy, then God will honor me and accept me as a sincere man. If I'm not a good man, at least a sincere man, and He'll get busy making you good after a while, to seek to know Christ and to learn how He can help us.

Now, this unprofitable business of seeking foolish questions, answers to foolish questions and genealogies and all the rest, have eaten the heart out of Judaism that Paul sought to protect the church from. And I've done it all down these years. Maybe that's why false teaching has never got to start in this church. Anybody came in, it never got rooted.

I remember maybe it was 20 years ago or 22 years ago that somebody got British Israelism, somebody began to talk about it. I think some old lady got into the prayer band. Somebody came and tipped me off. I remember who it was. I think she's here this morning. Miss Sandra, excuse me for telling on you. She told me, she said, you know some people here are beginning to believe British Israelism, and I said, thank you for letting me know.

So I went down to their office and I bought a box full of their books, and I read them. And I announced a sermon called "Faith of our Faddist." Moodys picked it up and advertised it for me over the radio. They thought it was kind of interesting. And I preached on that, British Israelism, a religious fad. That killed that so dead I've never heard of it since. That's more than 20 years ago, and I've never heard of it since. It perished and was buried and gone.

I wonder if the reason we've been so blessedly free from crackpots and weirdies and odd balls and all the rest; I wonder if it might be because with all of our faults, we've tried to be basically sincere. And tried to place the emphasis on that where the Bible places it, upon the need to know the will of God and do it, and the need to desire holiness of heart and the righteousness of life. I wonder if that could be one of the reasons God in His goodness has helped us on that.

Now, 1 Timothy 1:4, Paul tells Timothy about that same thing. He says, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith. Now, the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart and of a good conscience and faith unfeigned. Notice, the whole purpose of the Bible, is love out of a pure heart, a good conscious, and faith unfeigned. From which some having swerved aside, have turned unto vain jangling, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor whereof they affirm.

Paul was determined he was not going to allow any neat little tricks of interpretation to ensnare his people. He wanted them to be a holy people. And you know you've got to watch, got to watch the books you read, you've got to watch what you hear over the radio. Even from good stations, you've got to watch. Because there are teachers who are busy. They're not false teachers exactly, they're simply teachers who are trying to twist out of responsibility. For instance, Psalm 1, blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law doth he meditate day and night. You know what our teachers tell us about that Psalm? They tell us, some of them, that that Psalm, is a picture of Jesus Christ. The Psalms are messianic and that's the introductory Psalm, therefore that Psalm is a picture of Jesus Christ.

And you know what that interpretation does? It instantly relieves me of all responsibility. If that pictures Jesus Christ, then I don't come in on that at all. And isn't my business to see to it that I walk not in the way of the sinner or the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in sinners' way, nor sit in a scornful seat. If I can make that to describe Jesus, I'm perfectly willing to say, oh sure that pictures Jesus. And so I'm free. I can kick up my heels and as Brown says, raise hell on the way to heaven.

And then 1 Corinthians 13, that wonderful, terrible chapter that gives me more trouble than any other chapter in the entire Bible probably, Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I've become a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. You know what our teachers do with this, some of them, they say this describes Jesus. So, let it describe Jesus, and you and I have no obligation toward it at all. Well, of course, the terrible snare lies in this, that Jesus Christ is described in Psalm 1, and He is described in 1 Corinthians 13. In as much as anytime you describe a holy man, you describe Jesus, for He was and is a Holy Man.

But 1 Corinthians 13, was never written as a description of Jesus. It was written to show how Christians ought to be. And until we Christians have done everything that we know how in prayer and surrender and faith and obedience, to have this kind of love in our own hearts, we have been simply tricked by this chapter. Imagine, if you will, a man who has the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy and understands all biblical mysteries and has all knowledge and has such faith that He can move mountains and bestows his good to feed the poor. He's so generous, he's the talk of

the town. And though he's willing to give his body to be burned as a martyr. And still he can do all of this and still have a bad motive in it, and have not love and it will profit him nothing.

A mighty easy way to get rid of this, turn it over to Jesus Christ, just the way they got over the Sermon on the Mount, by giving that to the Millennium, saying that's the charter for the Millennium. That's the kingdom constitution. And when Jesus institutes the Millennium, that will be the constitution. Well, my brethren, I don't want to be abusive. I want to be kind, but I'll tell you this, I can't bring myself to be so insincere as all that. I believe that this means me and I'm going to take it to myself and I'm going to struggle and labor and pray that these passages may describe me as well as describing Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now, he says in verse ten, a man that is an heretic reject. Here's a strange thing and a solemn thing about this word heretic. It doesn't mean what it means now. Now, a heretic is a false teacher. He is somebody who does not teach the truth. By picking out certain things and denying certain other things, he builds a fabric of untruth and teaches that. That is a heretic, as understood in our day. That is the meaning in church history. But that is not the meaning of the word as Paul used it.

Anybody who knows the Greek or has access to sources where he can learn what the Greek means, knows this is not what is meant. By the word heretic here, he meant not a false teacher, but a schismatic. That is, somebody or anybody who for any reason, is resentful and offended or has his feelings hurt, who tends to get silent and withdraw from communion and sometimes gather a few malcontents around him and have a little group of quiet rebels who don't go along with the crowd or the other Christians. They're not teaching false doctrine, they're schismatics.

A man that is a schismatic; a man that is a divider; a man that is a troublemaker; a man that is an injurious critic, reject. But the word reject here means shun or avoid. And of course, it is after a first and second admonition. You don't just pick a man up and throw him out. But after you have given him a quiet admonition and maybe a second one. After that, shun him and avoid him the Scripture says. That's in harmony with the words of Jesus in Matthew 18, where he tells us that if people do what they shouldn't do, try to be reconciled to them. And if they won't listen, go to them again with some others. And after that, let them be publicans and sinners.

Well, now Paul says a man that is an heretic, after you've done what you can for him. That is, a man who is a schismatic, a troublemaker. Up to now, I've never split anything except a bit of wood when I was a boy. And I hope I'll be able to run my race as a obscure Christian minister, without dividing the children of God in any way. But I wouldn't hesitate to divide them if I knew it meant a matter of doctrine or moral.

I believe that there may come a time in the future when God will send somebody with an axe to split the Christendom wide open; line the men up on one side and the boys on the other and find

out who the men are. I believe that. But in the meantime, to be a schismatic, to out of resentfulness or offence or hurt feelings, withdraw, cease to testify, stop praying, say little, but what you say, all on the side of the devil and against the local church. That's what Paul had in mind. And sometimes if a man like that was influential enough, he managed to get a group of malcontents around him and he started another church. A great many of the churches started in this country were started that way.

Well, I never split one but I help bring two back together again. Some of you old timers remember that, that this church had split before I came here? About 32 years ago, it had split. And part of them had gone down here and part of them stayed here and had two churches. And after I'd been here about two years, they all came back together again. They threw their arms around each other and made up and turned the old building down there over to a garage. And we've got some of your right here now that belonged to that old crowd.

So, it's good to do it all be over on the other side, not a schismatic and divider, but a healer and a bringer together. No, I don't think I did that. So don't think I'm boasting here now. It just happened. I was here when it happened. I didn't bring them together. They just came together. He says, knowing that these subverters and schismatics, knowing that he, that is, such is subverted and sinneth, being self-condemned.

Then, to conclude, Paul instructs Titus. Remember he had left Titus at Crete that he might organize the church and appoint elders, get everything straightened around there. It was rather a mixed-up, confused church and Paul wanted order there. Always like Wesley and that he wanted order, so we got order there. And he says in verse 13, something that I, reminded me last Sunday night. He said, brings Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them. Zenas and Apollos were, Zenas was a lawyer who had turned missionary and the Apollos was a great orator who had turned missionary.

And these two men were on their journey somewhere, and he said, now when they come by Crete on their way, have a shower for them. And give them, help them diligently that nothing they wanting for them. He said see to it. And I thought of last Sunday night when we and the time before that, times before that. Next Wednesday, when they have a shower on Peggy Argyle. Receive these and send them diligently on their way and see that there's nothing wanting unto them. That kind of ties in with the old Pauline method of doing things and I like it.

And I don't know what the Lord may do with me in old age if I live to be old. But I remember what he said to Peter, he said, when I was young, thou didst gird thyself and do what you please. But when you get old, somebody else will gird you. You'll have to do some things you don't like. Probably, the Lord to finally humble me and prepare me for heaven will let me be a member of a church somewhere that does everything I don't like in order to humble me. But I hope one thing

he doesn't do, I hope He never lets me get into a church where they never send out a missionary or have a shower on anybody to send them fruitfully on their way. Bring Zenas and Apollos on their journey diligently he said. Nothing be wanting unto them.

Then verse fourteen, notice, and let ours also learn to maintain good works that profess an honest trade in order that for necessary uses, in order that they may be not unfruitful. Do you know what Paul had in mind here? He had in mind these showers and this preparation of missionaries. He said, send them out well-equipped and in case any of you can't give anything, get a job, he said, in order that you'll have some money to take care of things like this, actually. This dear old man of God, I guess he forgot people have to live, because he tied it right in with Zenas and Apollos and their missionary journey and said, profess honest trade and get a job in order that you might have an income so that you be not unfruitful and you can do this kind of thing.

Well, that was Paul. And he then finally in verse fourteen, leaves us with, maintain good works. Paul couldn't stand idleness. And Paul couldn't stand irresponsibility. He couldn't stand slothfulness nor unfruitfulness. When Paul looked at a tree and there was no fruit on it, his heart ached. He wanted fruit on that tree. He looked at a Christian who was just twiddling his thumbs and immediately he sat down and wrote a stiff epistle and said, get up and get going and get a job and go to work and let the word of God tee you off. Let it get you moving, get you going. Don't simply sit in an ivory tower and be a Christian in your head. Get down to business. Gear into life and be useful and don't be unfruitful. I think it's a good way to leave us.

Then he says grace be unto you. Thank God for this old man. Grace be unto to you all. They say he was a Georgian, that he was a native of Atlanta. But anyway he closes his passage, grace be with you all. And incidentally, the students, who make it their life work the dig into such things, say that Elizabethan English, you all, was a pure Elizabethan phrase. And the reason that is used in the south is, that several hundred years ago, people came there from England, lived in the mountains and country sections and were insulated somewhat and kept the pure language of old England. And so when a man comes up and says, well God bless you all, come back, he's speaking Elizabethan English. We kid about it and say he has a southern accent, but maybe it's us that had the accent and they then have the pure Elizabethan. Let's not be so sure of ourselves. Anyway, both are nice. So, it's alright.

All that are with me salute thee. What a gathering it's going to be. There, there's going to be Tychicus who is a faithful and beloved brother, Zenas the lawyer turned missionary, Apollos the orator turned missionary, Paul and Titus and the rest of the brethren says, everybody salutes you. Greet them all in love and faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.

I love it myself. I love this old book more now than I ever did in all my life; wonderful old book. Just turn across the page and you run unto Epaphras, Marcus and Aristarchus and Demas and

Lucas. All these brethren, we're going to see them there all right in that day. There's no question about their being there. The only question is, will we be? They've made it. Their journey's ended. They've laid down their burden. They've picked up, maybe not their crown yet, but at least they're there. We're still traveling on the way.

In the John Bunyan's great classic allegory, Pilgrims Progress, Pilgrim and some of the others, the Christian and some of the others swam across the river. Old Christian almost sinks, and Hopeful says, I found a sandbar, come on, and pulls you over onto the sand and pretty soon they come up on the other side. And there is the great gate of the city Celestial. And up before that gate, struts a self-important cocky fellow, knocks at the door and says, well, open up, I'm here. And the old man who handles the door says, where's your proof? Well, I don't have any, he said. Where's your script? And to Bunyan that meant the inner witness. He said, where is your witness? Well, he didn't have any. He said all right, go down. And then Bunyan closed his great book with these awful words. And then I perceive there is a way to hell from the gate of heaven. Terrible. Old Calvin, Puritan. The Calvinists nowadays wouldn't accept that. They'd edit that out, or at least sluff it over. He said, I perceive there was a way to hell from the gate of heaven, and closed His book.

Brethren, don't take yourself for granted. The blood cleanses and God delivers and wherever there is sincerity and humility and faith, God will build a wall around you and protect you from everything. He'll send His angels to guard thee and shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.. As soon as you start taking yourself for granted, look out. Aristarchus and Demas and Apollos and Zenas, they're over there. You and I aren't there yet.

I'm not opening the question of eternal security here. I'm only saying, let's be awfully sure we're there, we're in the grace of God. That we have the grace of God indeed and not only imagine we have. Let's be awfully sure about that. For a lot of people traveled the Christian highway that have not the credentials in their hearts. They only think they have. And they that go from the gate of heaven to hell, are not those who have the credentials. That's not the point and lost them. No. They are those who never had them but only thought they did.

And maybe that some of you have gotten religion on your Sunday school teachers' reputation. Or you've gone with the crowd and you moved along with your bunch. That's not harmful. It's alright, I suppose. But be awfully sure each of you. And I pray that you young people who are going off to schools, don't live on the enthusiasm generated by youth. Don't take anything for granted. See to it that the blood cleanses and the Holy Ghost renews and that God has accepted you and that you've got the witness within. For there's a way to hell from the gate of heaven.

Goodbye, Paul. We'll be back to see again next Sunday. No, later, because you can't preach without Paul. There's no use. The Lord made him so important in the book, that you start preaching in the book of Numbers and you've got to get to Paul pretty soon. God gave him such a place, Paul and

David. David in the Old Testament, Paul in the New, what a pair they make. I never asked anybody for his signature, his autograph, so help me in my lifetime. I've autographed a good many hundred things, but I never ask anybody for one. Outside of being on a check, it wouldn't be of any value to me. And I don't get many of them. But I'll say this, there are two men I want to meet. I don't want to go up and meet them as equals. I just want to be permitted to stand off at a little distance and gaze at them with love and wonder, David and Paul, marvelous old brethren.

Paul, a man of God who couldn't stand a tree that didn't bear fruit. David, the man of God with his homemade harp, who looked up with tears and said, what is man that Thou art mindful of him. I want to meet them both. And you know what? I've got a real deep feeling I'm going to do it one of these times. For the God, the God Eternal has taken all my sins away. And David's royal fountain has delivered me from all the weights that would take me down there. I hope you can say the same. I trust you can. God bless you.