

Part One
Goal of the Believer

Blind Men Running From Trunk to Tail

What is the goal of the believer in Jesus Christ? What is the central focus of the New Testament?

I believe you will read some things in this series from the New Testament that you may not have considered before or seen quite in the same light, I ask that you at least consider if there is a witness in your spirit that the things I say are true, that you would read through and go before God on your knees by your bed with your Bible open before you and say, “God show me, God show me.”

I would like to begin by reading a familiar poem, one that I’m sure most of you have heard before.

The Six Blind Men of Hindustan

There were six men of Hindustan,
to learning much inclined,
Who went to see an elephant,
though all of them were blind,
That each by observation
might satisfy his mind.

The first approached the elephant,
and happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
at once began to bawl,
“This mystery of an elephant
is very like a wall.”

The second, feeling of the tusk,
cried, “Ho, what have we here,
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me ‘tis mighty clear,
This wonder of an elephant
is very like a spear.”

The third approached the elephant,
and happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
thus boldly up and spake,
“I see,” quoth he,
“the elephant is very like a snake.”

The fourth reached out an eager hand,
and felt above the knee,
“What this most wondrous beast
is like is very plain” said he,
“’Tis clear enough the elephant
is very like a tree.”

The fifth who chanced to touch the ear
said, “E’en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
deny the fact who can;
This marvel of an elephant
is very like a fan.”

The sixth no sooner had begun
about the beast to grope,
Than seizing on the swinging tail
that fell within his scope;
“I see,” said he, “the elephant
is very like a rope.”

So six blind men of Hindustan
disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
exceeding stiff and strong;
Though each was partly in the right,
they all were in the wrong!

We must understand this truth about the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven, the church as it now is in this world, is filled with mixture. Christian thinking is filled with truth and it is filled with lies, and the two are so mixed together that it is nearly impos-

sible to tell the difference. In Matthew Chapter 13, in the parables of Jesus as Matthew recorded them, we find a recurring point that Jesus is making. The parable of the tares makes that point clear and then the remaining parables continue to illustrate that theme. Let's read Matthew 13 verse 24.

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field: How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'

And Jesus continues with this line of thinking, that in the kingdom of heaven, there is both that which is good and that which is not good, that which is truth and that which is not truth. He continues with branches filled with birds; meal filled with leaven; fish both good and bad.

Now, I do not want to use this understanding of Jesus to analyze God's people. I think we get ourselves into a wrong spirit by looking at people and asking, "Is this person a tare or a wheat?" I don't think Jesus for us to do this, because He said just before this, "Do not judge one another"; it's not our place.

But we need to understand something here about the kingdom of heaven - about our present understanding of the gospel.

Here is the problem that we as Christians have. We have been given a New Covenant by God. When God gave us the New Covenant, according to Hebrews Chapter 8, He found fault with the

Old. Hebrews 8 says that God found fault with the Old Covenant, set it aside, and brought in the New Covenant to take the place of the Old. We understand that we are in a relationship with God based on the New Covenant. And the Old Covenant, though it is useful to us, does not describe for us our relationship with God.

I want to focus on the New Covenant. One of the strongest battles in the early church was between those Jewish believers who wanted to impose the Old Covenant on the church of Jesus Christ, versus the apostle Paul who stood alone, often, in defending the New Covenant against those who wanted to impose the Old. Sad to say, throughout the last 2000 years of church history, Paul has not been the winner. The winner in that contest for the last 2000 years has been the Jewish Christians of that time, and others following in their same mentality, who want to make more of the Old Testament than what God allows.

The purpose of the Old Testament is to help us to understand the New. In whatever way the Spirit of God uses the Old Testament to enlarge our understanding of the New Covenant, the covenant that we have with God, the Old Testament is a wonderful blessing from God. But whenever the Old Testament is used to define and regulate the New Covenant, it becomes a curse.

This happens over and over again. God's people will go into the Old Testament, find a verse that speaks against New Covenant truth, that speaks against things that Jesus said, and they will use this Old Testament verse or passage to do battle against the New Testament. We see this particularly with a verse in Jeremiah, the very one who said that God is doing away with the Old Covenant and bringing in a New. However, under the focus and definition of the Old Covenant, Jeremiah made this statement, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Later in the same book, Jeremiah says that God will write His laws in our heart in the New Covenant.

Let's turn to 2 Corinthians 3:2-3, to see if this has happened in our lives, because we are living in the New Covenant.

You are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read by all men, clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

As believers relating to God in the New Covenant, we have hearts filled with the writing of God, with the law of God, with the nature of God. In Ephesians, Paul says that we look at our hearts and see Christ, not by what we see with our natural eyes, but by faith. Paul says, "Christ lives in our hearts by faith." It is terribly sad that dear believers in Jesus will go back to the Old Covenant and get this verse from Jeremiah, "The heart is deceitful above all things," and they will come in and use it as a weapon to fight against the New Covenant. They use it to destroy the understanding in a believer that God has given him a new heart, and that heart is good, that heart is written with law of God. They say, "Oh no, your heart is wicked, your heart is deceitful, it will lead you astray," because of an Old Covenant verse. This is a sad, sad, defeat of the gospel.

In the New Covenant we walk by faith and not by sight. That is, we do not go by what we see with our own eyes, but we believe that what God says about us is true. I do not look at my own heart, at its weaknesses and failings, and decide for myself what is true, reinforcing my eyesight by words from the Old Covenant. No, I look at what God says about my heart and believe it to be true. My heart is brand new; it is a letter written by God.

Paul lost this battle for the rightful use of the Old Testament. When you look down through the 2000 years of Church history, in the Protestant reformation, in many moves of the Spirit through the centuries, the Judaizers of the first century are the winners, not Paul. Because down through the centuries, the Old Testament has been used as a weapon to define and regulate our understanding of God and the New Covenant - in part. Not completely, but in part. This is part of what Jesus means in the parable of the tares. Down through the centuries of the church age, there will be much from the New Covenant, but there also will be much from the Old Covenant that is used to defeat the New Covenant, to drive it into a corner, and to rule and regulate in the church of Jesus Christ; there will be a mixture.

So we understand, on the authority of Hebrews 8, that God replaced the Old Covenant with the New; God found fault with the Old Covenant because it did not have the purpose of establishing us in a relationship with God. The purpose of the Old Covenant ended in Jesus on the cross. Jesus said, "The law and the prophets will not pass away until all are fulfilled." Notice he said "Fulfilled." The Old Covenant was fulfilled in the cross of Jesus Christ. When Jesus said, "It is finished," every point of the Old Covenant in that moment was fulfilled - all of it was fulfilled. Out of His resurrection comes the New Covenant and it is in the New Covenant that we live. The purpose of the Old Covenant for us is to help us to understand the New Covenant, not to rule over it.

What was the purpose of the Old Covenant? Simple. The Old Covenant was not given to show us what God is like; Jesus came to do that. The Old Covenant was not given to make anyone right with God; Jesus' sacrifice did that. The Old Covenant was given for three things. First, it makes sin exceedingly sinful. God gave the Law (according to Paul) to increase sin, not decrease it. Second, it establishes the justice of God's curse against fallen humanity. The Old Covenant ends with the word "curse," and every part of it carries that curse with no possibility of life. Third, the Old Covenant kills. Paul called the Ten Commandments the ministry of death; it is the law of sin and death.

Anyone in today's church who supports any Jewish claim to any part of a fulfillment of the Old Covenant hates the Jews. The Old Covenant can only increase their sin, place them under God's curse, and kill them. It is death! Life comes only from the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus.

So we have the New Covenant from Matthew 1 to the end of Revelation. In Revelation 22: 18-19, John says,

For I testify to everyone who hears the prophesy of this book: if anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, and

from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

John is speaking of this vision God gave him that we call “Revelation,” but I believe that this principle extends to the entire New Testament. This is the legal and living document by which we stand in relationship with God. John is speaking of the book of Revelation, but I believe the Spirit of God is speaking of the entire New Testament. Don’t add to it and don’t take away from it. Don’t pull in Old Covenant verses that take away from the New Covenant, only use the Old Testament to help us understand the New. Don’t listen to things people say that add to the New Covenant. At the same time, don’t take away any word God speaks in the New Testament.

Now, remember our poem – the six blind men. Think of the New Testament as this elephant.

Our problem is bigger than we realized. The New Testament is a big book, filled with many things. This is not surprising. God is a big God! The New Testament is large and complicated.

The gospel itself is simple – believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Trust in Him; call upon Him. By the work of the cross and by His blood He will cleanse you and the Holy Spirit will come upon you because of the blood and He will lead you.

Sometimes we find contradictions in the New Testament, truths that seem to be on opposite sides of a spectrum. The biggest such contradiction is jeopardy versus assurance. The New Covenant is filled with assurance verses. “Accepted in the beloved.” “If God is for us who can be against us?” “He will complete the good work He has started.”

At the same time, the New Covenant is filled with jeopardy verses. The most frequent command in the New Testament is “Watch out, take heed, beware.” The strongest jeopardy verse is, “We shall be partakers of Christ, if –.” “If” is conditional.

Side by side, in the New Testament, we have assurance verses and jeopardy verses. We are just like those six blind men; they are

the story of Christianity. As believers we go from one truth to the next to the next. Each time we think we have it now; now we understand what God is all about.

I see this with people that I know and love. I was in a fellowship of Christians who leaned towards the jeopardy side. There are many Christian groups that do this, it is not unusual; in fact, it is more common in Christianity to lean towards the jeopardy side.

“You are partakers of Christ, if . . .”

But the problem was that there were many verses we ignored, skipping over without reading the assurance verses stuck right in the middle of the jeopardy verses.

It was almost a game, let's preach jeopardy and ignore assurance. People became starved of hope in Jesus. Can we not hope? Do we always live under a shadow of “what if” and “maybe”?

People cannot live under a cloud of jeopardy, so they leave it and move into the assurance side. They run away from jeopardy and discover the wonderful assurance verses, the many verses in New Testament that give us hope and joy that this thing is not up to us, it is up to Jesus who will win.

Jesus will win.

But here is the problem. Over and over, believers do the same thing they did before. They were in the jeopardy side because they ignored assurance; now rushing over to assurance, they ignore jeopardy. “Oh, that's just negative. We don't need that negative stuff anymore.”

We do exactly what we did before, ignoring half of the New Testament.

We are just like those six blind men, going from tail to tusk to ear to side of this elephant that is too big to really understand. We are blind; we don't see the whole truth clearly.

Must this be? No!

Jesus said in John 16, “The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth.” It is not God’s intent for us to blindly go from one part of this New Covenant to the next, imagining that each time we arrive at a new discovery of truth we should abandon the previous things He has taught us.

We are not dealing with an ear, a leg, or a tail. We are dealing with an entire living creature. The elephant is not the sum of its parts, tacked together. The elephant is a living creature, wonderful, intelligent, with personality. An elephant has a trunk, legs, a side, but he is not those, he is a living creature that breathes and thinks and moves.

This is the way we understand the New Covenant. We must take the whole thing. We must not add to it from the Old Covenant or human reason or Christian tradition. No, we must take the entire New Covenant, all of it. Not with our reasoning minds, no. The words Jesus speaks are “Spirit and they are life.”

2 Corinthians 3 says that God has written the New Covenant on our hearts, in verse 6 Paul says “not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” In verse 18 Paul says, “But we all with unveiled face . . . are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory. . .” This is a New Covenant that goes from glory to glory. We must have all of it.

As we see the whole thing, we do not ask, “Is it jeopardy” or “Is it assurance.” No!

The history of Christianity is the history of which verses to cut out of the New Testament and which to promote. Every one of us does this. We emphasize the verses we like and ignore the verses we don’t like.

It is amazing to me how willing we are to correct Jesus. Do I dare to take the things Jesus said and soften them, taking off the sharp edges in order to give people “hope”? What am I doing? It’s the whole gospel. It’s a living covenant. We cannot pick and choose. If we have erred in our understanding, Lord, increase our understanding.

Can a Christian lose his salvation or is he assured of salvation?

Because we are running from trunk to leg to tail we can entertain such a question. When we see the New Covenant as a living and complete entity, we see both jeopardy and assurance. The New Testament doesn't ask us that question at that level. Blind people who run from trunk to leg to tail ask that question. The New Covenant is a living document, a living relationship.

Jesus will win. That is indisputable.

(Continued in Part Two)