

(Continued from Part One)

## **Paganism or God's Heart: Take Your Pick**

Here's what we do, this is true of all believers, and all groups, through all Christianity. We take one part of the New Testament, we pick out those verses we like and we use those verses to rule the whole New Testament, both in our understanding and in what we teach.

For instance, my pastor uses these verses from Romans 8 to focus the whole New Testament. "If God be for us, who can be against us . . ." "We are more than conquerors through Jesus who loves us." Etc.

When my pastor looks through the Bible for texts, he finds those verses that are in agreement with this passage from Romans 8. Now, God teaches every minister of the gospel. We cannot teach what God does not give. God gives only a part to each one, just a part of the picture. As each one gives what God gives them; the entire truth comes into view. However, we must understand what Jesus taught about the kingdom of heaven.

Every pastor teaches wonderful things, vital and important, yet, because they don't understand the whole gospel, they throw in things that are completely false and dangerous to the safety of the church.

On the other hand, I recently read an article by someone who feels sent by God to correct the false teaching of those who teach us to put our trust and hope in Jesus, that He will do in us what He says. You see this view coming from many. This writer focused on Hebrews 10:26

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

So this writer claimed that pastors who teach hope in Jesus

are deceiving the people because if a Christian does not stop sinning they're going to hell, according to these verses.

Christians so often use part of the New Testament to do battle against other parts of the New Testament. Both sides do this.

Verses in the New Testament are not given to do war with other verses of the New Testament. Why would God do that? All verses are given us to believe.

God says, "If we sin willfully . . ." That is a word from God for me to believe. I receive it, I believe it, I embrace it, and I let it do its work in my heart.

When God says in another place, "You are more than a conqueror," or "Nothing can separate you from the love of God," I receive it, I believe it, and I embrace it. I expect God to fulfill it in my life.

Both words! Both words. I believe. Why? Because God said both.

I don't need to defeat Hebrews 10 with Romans 8. I don't defeat God's words in Romans 8 by using God's words in Hebrews 10. God spoke both, I hear and receive both, I believe both, and I trust in God to fulfill His word in my life.

The gospel, the New Covenant, is the whole thing.

Now, we cannot possibly take in the entire New Covenant all at once, all at the same level. That is not God's intention. There IS New Testament truth that stands above and helps us to understand and interpret the entire Bible. But we must be careful which verses we pick. Every group in the history of Christianity, every believer, has certain verses they have picked out, and they use those verses to rule their understanding of the entire Bible.

Any verse that doesn't fit is ignored or reinterpreted or explained away. Every verse that doesn't line up with the primary understanding is cut out. To illustrate I could take an inexpensive Bible and a pair of scissors and start cutting. This verse, that page. There is

a group of Jewish Christians in America who believe in Jesus as their Savior. But they have decided that Paul was an enemy, so anything from Paul or Luke, a disciple of Paul, was not given by God. They have cut them out of the New Testament.

That seems drastic, yet we all do that. We watch God's people who leave one group and go to another group. Jeopardy to assurance or vice versa. We watch them restore all the verses they used to cut out and cut out all the verses they used to emphasize. It is sad.

God has spoken every single word. But we will interpret the Bible through a handful of verses. It must be. Which verses do we use to interpret the rest of the Bible?

Which verse you use as your defining verse will affect your life more dramatically than you understand. The verses we pick to define and regulate the rest of the Bible will determine the course of our lives, both in this world and the next - more than we think.

Try this: judge what we do with the verses that do not fit and that we do not like. Do we skip them? Do we explain them away? Do we knowingly read them wrong? If we are honest, we'll realize we do that a lot more often than we think.

We need to stop in our tracks and ask God to help us.

One trick used to cut verses out of the New Testament is called dispensationalism. We can get rid of many New Testament verses by invoking dispensationalism. That is the idea that some verses are to be fulfilled in our lives and some are to be fulfilled only in heaven.

I once heard a pastor teaching on Ephesians 4 where God says in verse 11, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers . . ." The pastor said that in the past Christians have claimed that this is not to be fulfilled in our day. God gave apostles to the early church, but not today; today there are no apostles. The apostles today are simply the books of the New Testament. This pastor said, "Yes, today God has apostles in His church. We don't need to get rid of this verse by

placing it in a different time period. There is nothing in this verse that would tell us to do so.”

Then this pastor went on to read verse 13 “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Then without thinking, the pastor pointed out that verse 13 will be fulfilled only in heaven. He retrieved verse 11 from the scissors of the dispensationalists, and then he proceeded to cut verse 13 out with the same pair of scissors, even though nothing in Ephesians 4 teaches us not to receive and believe for our lives right now the fulfillment of verse 13.

Sometimes the New Testament is clearly talking about something future. Satan being bound, the lake of fire, these things are clearly in the future because it says so. But those truths stated for the future are very few. And I refuse to use dispensationalism as an excuse for me to refuse to believe for my life right now something God speaks. If God speaks it in the New Testament, I believe it to be true for me right now. I don't need to cut it out.

As you seek God to understand what He teaches, upon occasion, verses leap out at you. A verse you have read over and over suddenly is made alive in a revelation of the Holy Spirit and you see truth you've never seen before. Here is what I've noticed, when you see a verse in that way, a new revelation of truth, it's not because suddenly the verse says something different, and not because you have mentally figured out something new. All of a sudden you now believe that verse to be true. A revelation of the Holy Spirit becomes nothing more than simply believing that what God says He means. Oh, it says “to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ!” Oh, it means that, and I can believe it, and the Holy Spirit makes it alive in me. We now believe what God says. You cannot believe anything in the New Testament without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to us to believe what God says. Without the Holy Spirit you can memorize, describe, write theology, but you cannot believe what God says.

Without the Holy Spirit you cannot believe what God says.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you see the verse and realize it says what it means and means what it says. As you believe it, it is made alive and it becomes life to you and you walk in the strength of that truth.

All you did was believe what it says.

Many people use John 3:16 as a dominant verse.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him shall not perish but shall have everlasting life.

And that is the entire gospel to them. Any verse that doesn't fit under that umbrella is irrelevant to them and has no purpose. For some the passage from Hebrews 19, "If you sin willfully" is a dominant verse, a defining verse in the New Testament. They will beat against any believer who happens to read some other verse as a defining verse and use it as a weapon of accusation. But just because that verse is misused does not mean it is not truth. It is truth, but as truth it is life, not a weapon against other believers or a scissors to cut out other verses.

Yes, these who accuse have some New Testament verses, but they lack the grace of Christ.

We all do this. We all use a handful of verses to rule and regulate how we view all the rest of the Bible. We must do this; as humans there is no other possibility.

But here is a sad thing. The defining understanding that almost all Christians use to define the New Testament and to rule the whole Bible is not found in the New Testament, it is not a Bible teaching. This is the overwhelming success of the planting of tares that has filled the church for 1800 years. The greatest doctrine of devils, the greatest deception, the most dangerous teaching is this: "The goal of the believer is to go to heaven when you die." The idea that Jesus died so that we could, upon death, escape hell and go to heaven. Even though the New Testament does not teach this, nevertheless it rules in the minds and hearts of God's people as the defini-

tion of the gospel.

Why is it a doctrine of devils? How is it the most dangerous idea in Christianity? Very simple! It rules, overwhelmingly, the way almost all Christians interpret the New Testament, and effectively causes them to completely miss God's purpose. That idea effectively separates you from the true purpose of God and the true goal of the believer.

When you read verses that teach you concerning the goal of the believer, these verses make no sense to you, they have no meaning because they don't fit into the strict little box that says "Jesus died to give me a ticket so that when I leave this life and go to the next, I have the pass that lets me go into heaven and not into hell." "Plus there are a few things about living life here while I wait."

First, this is a pagan viewpoint. It is not from the gospel of Jesus. Yes, there is a realm called heaven and when Christians die they exist only in the heavenly realm, but heaven is passing away; it is temporary. Those who are in heaven are incomplete, and they are waiting for God to finish their salvation. "Going to heaven" is not the goal of the believer. In fact, do a word study of the Greek word "*ouranos*" (heaven) through the New Testament. You will discover overwhelmingly that the thinking of the New Testament church was that heaven is coming here. In fact the words "go to heaven" are found twice concerning Jesus' work of atonement and then once when Paul says in Romans 10, "Don't say who will 'go to heaven' to find Christ. The word is near you now in your heart and in your mouth, the word that we preach." "Go to heaven - Go to heaven" fills the conversation of most Christians, yet Paul specifically commands us to say no such thing! Go figure!

Then whenever the New Testament does talk about the goal of the believer, we immediately put that into heaven. It is heaven that has the power to make it happen. That's going to happen when we go to heaven. We don't need to believe for it here, we don't need to make it our frame of reference here because it will just automatically happen when we go to heaven. Heaven is powerful, not what God says. Heaven has the power to make things happen in our lives. Any

verse that we think is too big for us here and now we just stick it up there in heaven.

That's why this doctrine of devils is most dangerous. By using this understanding Christians eliminate so many verses through this dominating and gross unbelief. It has effectively eliminated the church as a threat against Satan and his kingdom. It effectively removes the church from fulfilling the purpose of God. Satan is very happy to tolerate Christians whom he has already lost, if he can get them into this way of thinking, that the whole purpose of Jesus was so that when you die you go to heaven instead of hell. He has sidetracked you as a believer; you are no longer in a position to challenge his defiance of God.

The idea that the goal of the believer is to go to heaven and escape hell when you die is a pagan concept. It comes from pagan thinking, primarily Germanic paganism.

If you took the entire New Testament without input from non-New Testament sources you would not stay with that understanding. You would never produce the belief that the goal of the believer is to go to heaven when you die because you would not find it in the New Testament. But most Christians do not take all of the New Testament. They are willing to be taught things about the New Testament without searching it out for themselves. And they add pagan ideas to it and use pagan ideas to rule over the entire New Testament and to judge every verse.

Rather than going outside the New Testament, using pagan thought to find our defining verse – the goal is to go to heaven when you die – using paganism to rule and force the New Testament, let's go to the heart of the New Testament, the heart of God, to find our defining verse.

Here's the difference. The six blind men of Hindustan were each trying to interpret the elephant by judging only that little portion they had touched. The elephant thought, "What silly men! I am a living creature. Sir, you have my trunk, my tail, my leg. Those are parts of me. You are failing to look at me. I am a living creature."

So it is with the gospel. We cannot understand God from our perspective. We cannot understand God by running from one verse to the next, from one group to the next emphasizing a different set of verses, abandoning those things God taught us earlier. Trying to get rid of the false, the tares; tearing out, along with the tares, the things God has already taught us.

We are dealing with something not from our perspective. We are dealing here with the heart of God. The New Covenant is a revelation of the heart and purpose of Almighty God. God has made no mistakes. God created this world and placed man upon it after first allowing Satan to take up residence. God knew full well He was placing man into a snake pit. He knew the evil that filled the Garden of Eden. Was not Satan there? God knew full well He was placing this fragile creation into a den of iniquity. And God was after something other than the destruction of man. The New Testament clearly teaches us what God is after and it is not to retrieve a mistake. God did not send Jesus to fix a mistake and to pull out of this mess a handful that He can retrieve from a disaster.

God had a purpose from the beginning; not one thing has ever happened separate from His purpose. God purposed the salvation of Jesus before He created man; God is after something. And God is not fixing a disaster, taking a handful to heaven, saving them by the skin of their teeth.

The Bible is clear about God's purpose. From the heart of God we understand everything God says. If you want to know what the trunk is for you study the living creature called the elephant. You discover the purpose of the trunk; it is not a snake.

When we look at the heart of God, His intent and purpose, all other things in the Bible fall into place. We must find the one verse that gives us a clear insight into the heart and purpose of God. What is He doing? What does He want out of this thing?

It's not about saving us. It is about God obtaining His purpose. It is not about God fixing a mistake. It is about God accomplishing His intent. Everything that has taken place on this earth fits

into God's intention and purpose. The existence of evil is part of the purpose of God.

What does God want? What verse tells us?

**Romans 8:29**. This is the defining verse of the Bible.

You need to have this verse fill your mind and heart, not the pagan teaching that the goal of the believer is to go to heaven when you die, a concept that rules absolutely over the approach of most Christians to the entire Bible. Every time they read any verse, they force it into the perspective of that pagan idea.

I am challenging you to completely remove that concept from your mind and replace it with Romans 8:29 and its expansion throughout the New Testament. Romans is the central book of the gospel. Romans gives us the foundation of the gospel, Romans 1-12. Inside these 12 chapters, Romans 8 is the capstone, the climax. Inside Romans 8, the defining verse for the whole Bible is verse 29. Let's look at Romans 8:28-30.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His **purpose**. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

The purpose of God is to have many sons just like Jesus, conformed to His image.

From the beginning God determined that I would be just like Jesus.

God wants many sons just like Jesus; that is His purpose and goal. It doesn't matter if you are on earth or in heaven or on Mars or in the place of the dead or above all the heavens. God's goal is that you be just like Jesus, conformed to the image of His said. Salvation

is not geographical location; it is who you are. This truth should so dominate and fill your understanding far more than that other pagan verse “the goal of the believer is to go to heaven when you die,” which so rules how Christians cut and define and ignore what God says.

When Romans 8:29 fills your understanding, you no longer need to cut or define. What you will find yourself doing, if Romans 8:29 rules, is you will simply believe what God says. It is so simple. You believe it.

“Nothing can separate me from the love of Christ.” I believe it! “Watch out, take heed, beware.” I believe it! “If God is for me who can be against me.” I believe it.

I don’t need to define or interpret or cut or ignore; I simply believe what God says.

“Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” I believe it for right now. I don’t have to get rid of it; I believe it. Let God fulfill it in my life right now.

“Behold I am your servant. Let it be to me according to your word.”

And all thought that this has to wait till heaven vanishes, because I have removed that pagan definition from my mind.

It is about His life in me. It is about the purpose and intent of Almighty God.