

Questions/answers on Theology

by James Blaine Chapman

The sermon addresses key theological questions regarding fundamentalism, inspiration, conversion, and the nature of sin in Christian doctrine.

Scripture: John 1:29, John 17:15, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 9:26, Hebrews 12:14

Topics: "Biblical Inspiration", "Christian Fundamentalism"

Description

James Blaine Chapman addresses the concept of fundamentalism, criticizing the factional meaning given to the term 'fundamental' by certain groups who injected their own pet notions into the list of accepted Christian doctrines. He emphasizes that holiness is indeed a fundamental doctrine of the Bible and the Church, as without holiness, no one shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). Chapman also delves into the distinction between verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, highlighting the method and extent of inspiration by the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

QUESTION #287 -- What is fundamentalism? A certain well known fundamentalist team was refused admittance to all the churches in town except the holiness church. Yet the team teaches anti-holiness doctrines and would have been excluded from the holiness church at any other time. Is not the doctrine of holiness one of the fundamentals?

ANSWER #287 -- Certain good publicity agents took advantage of the term fundamental, a good word of general import, and gave it a factional meaning. In the list of generally accepted doctrines of the Christian Church they injected their own pet notions, making one plank in the platform a committal to the false and dangerous heresy of Augustinian and Calvinistic interpretation of unconditional and unavoidable perseverance on the part of the regenerated. This old heresy they dubbed with the new title "Eternal Security." But a list of "fundamentals" containing this erroneous and factional commitment would bar out James Arminius, John Wesley, Dr. Bresee, and, I think, the Apostle Paul. It is really a great pity that men committed to the task of defending the historic faith against the inroads of other ancient heresies which came out under the new name "Modernism" should adopt a policy that is so reprehensible and of such doubtful morality. But since they elected to do that, they were consistent in that they did not forsake their old heretical notions regarding the nature and incurableness of sin. It would be a pity for orthodox holiness teachers to be stained with a method of publicity which is open to such just criticism. Certainly, holiness is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible and of the Church. It is so fundamental that the Bible says

without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

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QUESTION #288 -- In the Herald of Holiness for April 20, Dr. Corlett mentioned verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. Please explain more fully the distinction.

ANSWER #288 -- These two terms do not stand on a common plane and comparison is difficult. Plenary means full, complete, and verbal means expressed in words, oral, literal. Thus plenary has reference to the extent and verbal to the method of inspiration. And as related to the Scriptures, verbal is included in plenary, although plenary extends to other methods also. To illustrate: one who believes in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures believes that "All scripture is God-breathed," as Paul said literally in 2 Timothy 3:16, although he may not be ready to say whether this was done by the express inspiration of every word or whether it was by means of thought, allowing some scope for the personality of the holy man who was the human author. But one who believes in the verbal inspiration believes also that "All scripture is God-breathed," and that the method employed by the Holy Spirit was that of taking complete charge of the mind and hand of the human author and dictating every word with no allowance for any variation through the channel of human agency.

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QUESTION #289 -- A woman here is puzzled. She says she was converted before she was born again. Isn't conversion and being born again the same thing?

ANSWER #289 -- If one is speaking technically, then of course conversion is a human act and the new birth is a divine act, and conversion does precede the new birth or regeneration. But in this sense conversion is just the equivalent of repentance. In ordinary language conversion and the new birth are the same thing. I speak of the time when I was converted, meaning the time when God converted me by regenerating my heart, rather than of the time (which was completed just at the moment when God touched my heart) when I converted myself by repenting and turning to God. I, personally, practically always use the terms conversion and the new birth as synonyms.

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QUESTION #290 -- Please give the original of "which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29); and "to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

ANSWER #290 -- The word for sin is the same in both cases. It is hamartia which originally meant the missing of a mark, and which applied to moral things doubtless implies the missing of the true end of life. It is the general word for sin in the New Testament, and means both the act of sinning and the result, the sin itself. Or, speaking a little more discriminately, it includes both actual and inbred sin. But the word for "taketh away" in John isairoo which is translated to raise or lift up (Mark 16:18; John 11:41); to bear or carry (Matthew 4:6; Luke 9:23); to bear away or carry off in general (Matthew 21:21; John 19:31); to remove by death (John 17:15; Matthew 24: 39); as well as describing the redeeming work of Christ (John 1:29 and I John 3:5). On the other hand the word in Hebrews 9:26 is athetasis and appears only one other time in the New Testament, in Hebrews 7:18 where it is translated "disannulling" in both the Authorized and Revised Versions, although I think most literal translations give it "a putting away." I would say that the general idea in John 1:29 and Hebrews 9:26 is the same, only in John the statement is simply that Jesus

is the Lamb of God to bear away the sin of the world, without designating in just what manner He bears it away. While the word in Hebrews emphasizes that He bears it away by nullifying it and robbing it of its power by substituting Himself for the victim which it has the right to claim. But in both cases there is an actual putting away of sin, and the texts are both consistent only with the fullest forgiveness and the most far reaching cleansing. There is no room for a sinning religion or for suppression or counteraction in either one of them.

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