
Rejecting the Cornerstone

“This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner” (Acts 4:11)

The most important stone in the building is the corner stone. In ancient times it was laid first as a point of reference by which the dimensions of the building were governed and through which the separate walls were joined together.

Jesus is the chief cornerstone. He is the origin and focal point of all creation, and through Him all things are held together. (Colossians 1:17) Rejecting Jesus is the ultimate absurdity! Yet the Jews of the first century made this very mistake.

— They wanted to interpret the Bible, but they rejected the Author of the Bible.

— They were intent upon establishing a kingdom, but went about it in such a way that they wound up rejecting the King.

— They wanted to build a house for God, but rejected the Chief Cornerstone.

— Having cast The Cornerstone aside, He then became to them a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

Jesus is God!

There is an old joke about the psychiatrist trying to help a man who claimed to be Napoleon Bonaparte. "How do you know you are Napoleon?", asked the doctor. "God told me!" came the quick reply. Immediately the patient in the next bed jumped up and screamed, "I DID NOT!"

The story is humorous because of its absurdity. When a man claims to be God his insanity is a foregone conclusion.

This was the problem faced by Jesus. Many of his contemporaries thought He was crazy. The difference is that Jesus declared His deity by "infallible proofs." The many miracles, signs and wonders proved His claims, and if this were not enough the Scriptures teach that He was declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead. It is not within the scope of this book to debate that question, but simply to emphatically remind you that Jesus is God.

Because God is a Spirit, we had no accurate way to understand Him until He became flesh. Whatever concepts we had of God before the incarnation were inadequate and incomplete. Jesus, by contrast, is the perfect representation of God. In Him dwelled all the fulness of God in a body. (Colossians 2:9)

The Jews were trying to understand God by means of a partial revelation. They had pieced together various passages in support of widely divergent views. They were hopelessly divided! All of these divisions would have disappeared in Jesus. We do not understand Jesus by the dark shadows of Old Testament typology, we understand the dark shadows of Old Testament typology by Jesus.

The Cornerstone is not lined up by the walls, the walls are lined up by the Cornerstone.

A room full of people might have a wide variety of opinions about what was casting a certain shadow upon the wall. The disagreement disappears when someone turns on the light. Jesus is the light and in Him there is no darkness at all!

A shadow is obscure and difficult to understand. For this reason those who try to understand God by means of the Old Testament Scriptures will forever remain hopelessly divided just like the Jews were.

Suppose, for example, that I am a very legalistic person and I want to picture God as being just like me. Starting with the Old Testament Scriptures I can select a lot of passages which

support this point of view. Nadab and Abihu were killed by God when they offered strange fire. (Leviticus 10:1ff) The men of Bethshemesh died because they looked into the Ark of the Covenant. (I Samuel 6:19) Uzzah died because he touched the Ark of the Covenant (II Samuel 6:7), etc. It is possible to construct a whole theology from this perspective. Once convinced that you are right, it is easy to see in Jesus only those qualities which support your preconceptions. Everything looks yellow to a jaundiced eye!

On the other hand, suppose I am very lenient and that I want to picture God as an "over indulgent grandfather" instead of a merciless judge. This too can easily be done by selecting only certain passages. Eleazar and Ithamar did something wrong, but nothing happened to them (Leviticus 10:12-20). Hezekiah and all the people observed the Passover "otherwise than it was written" (II Chronicles 30:18) and the Good Lord pardoned everyone of them. David ate the show bread which only the priests were supposed to eat and God didn't care, etc. Once the mind is programmed to think only in this way, again our view of Jesus is distorted so that we do not accurately discern His true nature.

The Cornerstone is not lined up by the building, the building is lined up by the Cornerstone. We do not understand Jesus by the Old Testament, we understand the Old Testament by Jesus. Every prophet possessed something of God's Spirit, but only in Jesus was the Spirit given without measure. Thousands and millions of people have God-like traits, but only in Jesus is the fulness of God incarnate in a human body . . . He is the perfect and complete representation of deity to humanity.

Today as we survey the jungle of confusion created by denominational division and partisan strife, we need a landmark which cannot be questioned from which to make our measurements and computations. That landmark is Jesus! If we trust in Him as an accurate reference by which to judge all things, the world assumes a new perspective. We cease to see anything from a purely human point of view (II Corinthians 5:16). Doubt and confusion disappear and in their place comes a beautiful design unseen by unbelieving eyes.

Jesus is God!

Unity or Division

The apostles of Jesus had deep seated and serious disagreements. Matthew the publican and Simon Zealotes, for example,

were from opposite extremes of political thought. One was a turn-coat Jew who collaborated with the Romans, the other a revolutionary firebrand who hated anyone who collaborated with the Romans and especially publicans.

It is noteworthy that Jesus selected His apostles after a long night of prayer. The unity which He would bring to them would be typical of that unity which He would make available to all.

The three years of Jesus' public ministry were characterized by many disagreements among the Twelve. Once when they were arguing about which of them would be the greatest, Jesus took a little child and set him in the midst of them. Upon that occasion he taught that unless they had a change of mind and became like that little child they wouldn't even enter into the kingdom let alone be someone great. On the way to Jerusalem James and John came with their mother to seek special positions at the right and left hand of His throne. The ten were moved with indignation! Even at the last supper they continued to bicker over prestige and position. It was then that the weary Christ arose to gird himself about and to wash their feet. "Know ye what I have done to you?" (John 13:12) He enquired. They probably did not.

Golgotha was just a few short hours away and the very men who were destined to be the foundation of His kingdom had missed the essence of what it was all about. No eye had seen, no ear had heard, and it had never entered into the heart of men what God was about to do. The genius of His strategy had even been obscured from the inquisitive minds of the prophets and the inquiring eyes of angels. (I Peter 1:10-12)

"By this" He said, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

For three years they had bickered with one another. How would it be possible for such men to love in such a way that the world would know? Only by means of the Holy Spirit! Jesus would not leave them like orphans with no guidance or help. He would return to their very hearts by means of the indwelling Spirit.

Fruit is the outward manifestation of the inward nature. Thus the very nature of an apple tree causes it to produce apples. The inexperienced eye may be confused by the design of a leaf or the grain of its wood, but anyone can tell a tree by its fruit. This is the way that Jesus taught us to discern religious

leaders. Men do not gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles. Good teachers do not produce bad fruit!

The Apostles who were plagued with disharmony were going to receive a new source of strength. If they would only abide in Jesus they would partake of His very nature. Like a branch draws strength from the vine, they would draw strength from Jesus by means of the Holy Spirit. The nature of the Holy Spirit is love . . . Therefore the "fruit of the Spirit is love . . ." Jesus said, "By their fruit ye shall know them . . ." So when we manifest love we are demonstrating the reality of our relationship with Jesus.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one toward another." (John 13:35)

The Sensual

"These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit." (Jude 19)

In a sex oriented society it is easy to think of sensuality only in terms of sexual immorality. In reality, sexual impurity is but one manifestation of the "natural" or "sensual" nature. Another very prominent aspect of sensuality is the lack of brotherly love. Jude reminds us that those who participate in division are sensual people who are void of the Holy Spirit.

The Galatian letter teaches to "walk in the Spirit" and thus avoid the "lust of the flesh." Again the context involves a divisive mentality:

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh . . ." (Galatians 5:13-16)

Biting and devouring one another directly results from the lust of the flesh.

The following verses in Galatians remind us that the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit is a lengthy one. Military terms are employed to describe the flesh entrenched on one side, and the Spirit entrenched on the other. Next the works of the flesh are listed. They involve not only a catalog of sexual misconduct, but also a wide assortment of ungodly attitudes which result in division between Christians. The two are part and

parcel of the same package. Fornication and lasciviousness are brothers to anger and sedition.

The Holy Spirit produces an entirely different kind of person . . . one who is characterized by love and a desirable variety of attributes conducive to unity. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self control are the very qualities personified in Jesus. Those who are walking in His Spirit will not be desirous of vain glory. They will not provoke and envy one another but will bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. (See Galatians 5:13 - 6:2.)

Once this basic dichotomy is accepted it can be seen throughout virtually all the Christian Scriptures. Those who are godly are producing love and unity, and those who are sensual are preaching confusion and division. God is not the author of confusion but of peace.

The only division ever created by Jesus was between people who believed in Him and people who did not believe in Him. The Holy Spirit does not create division among those who believe in Jesus. Those who engineer division between Christians are sensual and do not have the Holy Spirit.

Rejecting Jesus

The total strategy of God is bound up in Jesus. It is God's plan to gather together in Him all of the divergent factions of heaven and earth. (Ephesians 1:10) Everyone who is joined to Jesus is in a sense joined to one another and like spokes on a wheel the closer we get to Jesus the closer we get to one another. When we arrive at "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" we will not only be in perfect fellowship with God but also with every other person who arrives at that maturity.

Why would anyone reject Jesus as the focal point of unity. I think there may be many reasons. However logical or rational they may seem on the surface, they all boil down to the same irrational mistake of rejecting the Cornerstone. Our unity is not in doctrines about the church, our unity is in Jesus. He is the Head of His Body and all who are members of that body are united in Him. Fraternity is based upon paternity. Men with a common father are brothers regardless of how vehemently they may disagree on matters within the family. We are not brothers in Christ because we like one another, or because we

agree with one another, but because we have a common Father. It doesn't take an intellectual giant to discover that the Christian world is in a mess. One reason it is in this mess is that human pride prevents us from coming to Jesus in genuine repentance and child-like humility.

There is an old joke about the man who worked as a stage hand for a TV studio. He took pride in always being able to ad lib his way out of any situation. The supreme test of his creativity came while filming a Western. He was pouring ketchup on the back of a shoot-out victim, simulating a bloody death. By accident the camera panned back upon him so quickly that he was caught in the act. "What did you do then?" asked a friend. "What else could I do" he said, "I ate him."

The arrogant legalist will sometimes swallow a "camel" before he will own up to an honest mistake. The human mind can rationalize almost anything to avoid genuine repentance. Some have spent virtually a lifetime "cobbling up the kingdom" because they got mixed up about the Cornerstone. When some Stephen reminds them of their stupidity it is easier to destroy the prophet than it is to correct the problem. So we hang on to our pride with bulldog tenacity and let the world go to hell in the shambles of a divided church. We maintain the image that we have it all put together and if the religious world would just listen to us, harmony would immediately be restored. This is not the answer, it is the problem! You are not the Cornerstone! I am not the Cornerstone! Jesus is the Cornerstone!

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Two

1. What do the Scriptures mean by referring to Jesus as the "Word" of God? (John 1:1, 14, 18)
2. Why did God become flesh and dwell among us?
3. Explain how Jesus brought unity to His disciples.
4. Is there anyone who cannot find unity in Christ?
5. Is there any association between such sins as "fornication and lasciviousness" and "hatred and strife"?

6. Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement and went separate ways. (Acts 15:39) Were they divided in Christ or united?
7. Is there a difference between disagreements "in" Jesus and disagreements "about" Jesus?
8. If the apostles could speak to us personally do you think they would approve or disapprove of denominational divisions?
9. Is it right to make anything a condition of fellowship which God has not made a requisite for salvation?
10. Discuss the slogan "No Creed but Christ."