

September, 2008

# Pause Ponder Profit

## Are We Too Dogmatic?

by Harold Hancock

“A major survey by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life finds that most Americans have a non-dogmatic approach to faith. A majority of those who are affiliated with a religion, for instance, do not believe their religion is the only way to salvation. And almost the same number believes that there is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of their religion” (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/876/religion-america-part-two>). My thoughts: the majority may think there is more than one way to salvation and that there is more than one true way to interpret truth, but they are WRONG! However, I say this, not to judge them or condemn them, but to save them.

Christ is not “a way”; He is “THE WAY” to the Father (John 14:6). All spiritual blessings, including redemption, are in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3,7). By inspiration Peter said, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). If salvation is not exclusively through Christ, why did Jesus have to come to earth and die on the cross? Did God let

His Son leave Heaven and come to earth to suffer and die unnecessarily? As much as we might wish for all men to be saved no matter what their religion, Jesus Christ is our only hope. I tell people this, not because I think my way is right, but because Christ’s way is right; not to condemn people, but so they may learn of Christ (Matthew 11:28), believe in Christ (John 8:24), obey Christ, and be saved (Hebrews 5:9).

Furthermore, truth is not ambiguous. We can “know the truth” (John 8:32) and understand the “will of the Lord” (Ephesians 5:17). Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). On another occasion Jesus said, “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:8-9). The apostle John taught, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 1:9). There is the truth which can save us, and there are perverted gospels (Galatians 1:6-9) — scriptures twisted by men (2 Peter 3:16) and commandments of men (Matthew 15:8-9) — which make our worship vain and our attempts to be saved futile. It is not my doctrine that is right; it is not your doctrine that is right; it is the doctrine of Christ that is right and that must be followed. We must all, myself included, search the scriptures to see if the things we hear and believe are so (Acts 17:11). We should not count anyone an enemy who tells us the truth (Galatians 4:16).

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## “I Cannot Reverse It”

by Lowell Blasingame

Israel, in her quest to reach the land promised her, camped on the plains of Moab and Balak, king of the Moabites, became greatly alarmed by their number and sought help against them by sending for a sorcerer, prophet by the name of Balaam to place a curse upon Israel so he could prevail against them. Balaam told Balak’s messengers that he would have to consult the Lord and upon doing so was told “not to go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed,” (Num. 22:12). When Balak received Balaam’s refusal to come, he chose more honorable princes and sent them to Balaam and increased the promised reward which he had made before saying, “I will promote thee unto very great honor, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people,” (Num. 22:17).

This second group of messengers came and while Balaam told them, “If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more,” yet he entreated them to tarry for the night “that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more.” This tells where the heart of Balaam is. Balak’s promised rewards have gotten to him. The Lord spoke to Balaam and said, “If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I say unto thee, that shall thou do.”

So Balaam went and three times along the way an angel of the Lord stationed itself in the way to stop Balaam but Balaam’s ass saw the angel each time and averted Balaam’s being slain. The third time the ass did this Balaam’s anger was aroused to a degree that he beat the ass with his staff and God enabled the ass to speak, “What have I done unto thee that thou hast smitten me these three times?” Balaam’s answer was that it

had mocked him three times and that if he had a sword that he would have slain it. The ass asked if it had not belonged to him for a long time and had it ever acted in this way before — then Balaam’s eyes were opened and he saw the angel standing with its sword drawn. The angel told Balaam that he had been sent to withstand him and had it not been for the action of his ass that he would have slain him in the way. Again, we get an insight into Balaam’s heart in his saying to the angel, “if it displease thee, I will get me back again,” (Num. 22:34). Balaam’s greed for the gifts offered by Balak blinded him from seeing that the attempts made on his life by the angel manifests the angel’s disapproval of his chosen course so Balaam is told to continue his journey but told “but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak.”

When Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went to greet him and said, “Did I not earnestly send unto thee to call thee? wherefore camest thou not unto me? am I not able to promote thee to honor?” Balaam told Balak that he had come but that he could only speak what God put in his mouth. This didn’t seem to bother Balak because he was accustomed to hearing prophets whose gods spoke what he wanted them to say. So Balaam was taken the next day to high places of Baal so he could see the extent of Israel as their tents were spread across the valley. Seven altars were built and sacrifices of oxen and rams offered upon them. Balaam spoke saying, “Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram — to curse Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied? He continued to relate Israel’s increase and her prosperity. Balak was extremely displeased with Balaam who again reminded him that he could speak only words that the Lord put in his mouth (Num. 23:1-12).

Balak next took Balaam to the top of Pisgah where he could see a large part of the camp of

Israel and seven more altars are built and sacrifices offered. Balak waited by the altars while Balaam went to receive his message from the Lord. Balaam returned and spoke saying that God isn't man that He should lie or not keep what He promised and that he had "received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; **and I cannot reverse it**" He told Balak that God had not seen perverseness or iniquity in Israel and that there was no enchantment or divination that he could use against Jacob (Num. 23:18-24).

Balak asked Balaam to neither curse nor bless them but go with him to a different place and maybe it would please God to curse them from that place. So they went to the top of Peor that looked toward Jeshimon where seven more altars were built and sacrifices offered. This third time Balaam saw that it pleased God to bless Israel and he went not as he had done before "to seek for enchantments" but he lifted up his eyes and beheld Israel and the Spirit of God came upon him and he blessed Israel saying "surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" (Num. 24:1-13). Balak's anger has now reached the boiling point and he told Balaam that he had brought him to curse his enemies but he had three times blessed them. He said that he had sought to honor him but the Lord had kept him back from it. Balaam reminded the king that from the outset he had told him that he could say only the words that God put in his mouth and "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, **I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind**; but what the Lord saith, that will I speak" Some lessons to learn from Balaam;

(1) There are preachers for hire — Balaam knew what the Lord's will towards Israel was before he ever left his house for Moab because the Lord had told him when Balak's first

messengers came. "Thou shall not go with them; thou shall not curse the people; for they are blessed. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, "Get you into your land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you," (Num. 22:12-13). Balak sent "more honorable men," more important or prestigious men and likely with them increased the reward offered for his services. Balaam knew what the Lord's answer was but he never had gotten an offer like this before so he told these men if Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, "I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more," but I do request that you tarry "here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more," (Num. 22:19). Peter warned of false prophets that would with "feigned words make merchandise of you," (2 Pet. 2:1-3). Jude warned of some who "ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward" (Jude 11). Do you look for a preacher who will preach what you want to hear or one who preaches what God said?

(2) Preachers don't make the rules in religion — Balaam told Balak, "I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; **and I cannot reverse it.**" When Balak complained that Balaam had blessed Israel three times, Balaam replied that he told him in advance, "I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the Lord saith, that will I speak." Balaam's behavior indicates that he would like to have done what Balak wanted and received his reward but he knew he couldn't reverse what God said. Faith without works is dead and cannot save (James 2:20, 24) and being baptized precedes salvation (Mk. 16:16) or remission of sins (Acts 2:38) and preachers cannot reverse this!

(3) Preachers that don't practice what they teach are poor examples. Balaam upon being told

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The future of Israel said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like theirs," (Num. 23:10). Balaam couldn't die the death of the righteous because he hadn't lived a life of righteousness. Jude said that he loved the wages of wrong-doing, — we have to reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7-8).

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We cannot compromise truth nor change the word of God to make salvation theologically inclusive of anyone outside of Christ nor of anyone who is following the doctrine of the commandments of men. If we think we have found Christ and know truth, we should share Christ and His word with others, not arrogantly, but humbly, not to condemn but to give others the opportunity to hear, "test," and "hold fast that is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Perhaps, what some think is dogmatism is really just love for Christ, His word, and the souls of men — our soul and mine.

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***If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.***  
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