

## Lesson 3

# Other's Views on the Doctrine of Scripture

### *The Roman Catholic View of the Scriptures*

- Roman Catholics agree that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, but they differ widely as to the place that it has in the church. We believe that the Bible alone is the sole authority for faith and practice.
- The Catholic Church believes that the Bible is supplemented by 14 or 15 apocryphal books, the authority of the Greek and Latin church fathers, a huge collection of decrees by the Pope, church council pronouncements, and traditions which are of equal authority to the Bible.
- Although we also have traditions, counsels, and church authority, these are always in subordination to Scripture and can be re-evaluated and changed on the basis of Scripture.
- In contrast, the Catholic Church believes that there are two equal sources of authority; Scripture and developing tradition. They believe that the church is the judge of Scripture and therefore the source of the true interpretation of Scripture.
- In practice, the traditions of the Catholic Church can change at any time depending on what the church says the tradition is. Likewise, the interpretation of Scripture can change at any time depending upon what the church says it means.
- By interpreting Scripture in light of tradition the church in reality places itself above the Bible as the source of all authority. Theoretically, the church believes in the Bible, but in practice her traditions obscure its meaning and often forbid the people from following it.

**The Apocrypha:** a collection of 14 or 15 books that the Catholic Church believes to be a part of the Bible. These books were written in the time period between the Old and New Testaments and first appeared with a Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. They were named the Apocrypha from the Greek *apokruoha* which means "unrecognized" because they were viewed as false by the early church.

At the Council of Trent in 1546 the Catholic Church declared the Apocrypha to be Scripture. According to the protestant scholar, Boettner, the reason the books were added at that time was because the church needed to support its doctrines that the Reformers were vigorously attacking as unscriptural, some of which could only be supported by the apocryphal books.

**The Latin Vulgate:** a Bible version translated into common Latin by Jerome (340-420), is the only version recognized as authentic by the Roman Catholic Church. The Council of Trent declared in 1546 "if anyone receive it not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts ... as they are contained in the Old Latin Vulgate edition...let him be anathema." This was later confirmed by the Vatican council of 1870.

The inaccuracies of Jerome's translation are legion when compared to the standards of modern scholarship. The text has not been revised for centuries. The English Catholic Bible, called the Duay Version, is based on the Latin Vulgate and in reality is just a translation of a translation - an English translation of the Latin translation of the original Greek.

## ***The Mormon View of the Scriptures***

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) agrees that the Bible (only the King James Version) is the inspired Word of God, but like the Catholics, do not hold to it as the sole source of authority.

They believe "When the Lord's servants speak or write under the influence of the Holy Ghost, their words become scripture".<sup>[1]</sup> Therefore, they believe that "the Bible, The Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price" are Scripture, as well as "the inspired words of our living prophets".<sup>[2]</sup>

**The Book of Mormon:** The LDS church claims that *The Book of Mormon* is a record of the people who lived on the American continents between 2,000 B.C. and A.D. 400, and contains "the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ." *The Book of Mormon* tells of a visit that Jesus Christ made to the people in the Americas soon after His resurrection. They believe that their founder, Joseph Smith, translated *The Book of Mormon* into English through the gift and power of God. He said it is "the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding in its precepts, than any other book".<sup>[3]</sup>

They also believe that *The Book of Mormon* gives the power to avoid deception and to stay on the straight and narrow path. "Every Latter -Day Saint should make the study of this book a lifetime pursuit."<sup>[4]</sup>

**The Doctrine and Covenants:** The LDS church believes *The Doctrine and Covenants* is a collection of modern revelations (i.e. revelations for the church in these last days). They say it explains the organization of their church, "glorious truths that were lost to the world for hundreds of years," and sheds light on the teachings of the Bible.<sup>[5]</sup>

**The Pearl of Great Price:** The LDS church believes that *The Pearl of Great Price* is inspired. It contains additional writings of Moses allegedly revealed to Joseph Smith in 1830, and The Book of Abraham, as well as some writings by Joseph Smith. One publication says, "It clarifies doctrines and teachings that were lost from the Bible and gives additional information concerning the creation of the earth".<sup>[6]</sup>

They believe that the Book of Abraham was translated by Joseph Smith from a papyrus scroll taken from Egyptian catacombs.<sup>[7]</sup>

The writings of Joseph Smith include part of "Joseph Smith's inspired translation of the Bible."<sup>[8]</sup>

**The Word's of living prophets:** The LDS believe that they have living prophets who speak the word of God at conferences, in church publications, etc.<sup>[9]</sup>

With so many sources of authority it is no surprise to find the teachings in the LDS scriptures contradictory both to each other and the Bible (see Walter Martin's *Kingdom of the Cults*, 159 ff. who states that over 2,000 changes have been made to *The Book of Mormon* alone over the past 131 years). Again, unlike Biblical Christianity, authority outside of the Bible has superseded the authority of the Bible itself.

### ***The Jehovah's Witnesses View of the Scriptures***

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and use a number of translations, yet their own translation of the Bible called "The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures and the New World Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures" is viewed by them as the best. This so-called translation has a distinctive bias for J.W. doctrine and takes extreme liberties with the text.

Jehovah's Witnesses claim to be the only divinely directed organization, the channel for truth today. "...Jehovah had chosen the publication we now call *The Watchtower* to be used as a channel through which to bring to the world of mankind a revelation of the divine will and, through the words revealed in its columns, to bring a division in the world's population into those who would do the divine will and those who would not." [10]

Though lip service is given to the authority of Scripture, the average Jehovah's Witness simply views every passage in the Bible in light of the pronouncements passed down by the society. In reality, like both the Catholic Church and Mormonism, the ultimate authority and "proper" interpretation of the text lies with the organization. Apart from the organization the scripture cannot be understood.

### ***A Christian Response***

**The Question of Authority:** The Bible makes it clear that it alone is sufficient for salvation and growth, apart from any other documents, revelations, church pronouncements, or organizations' interpretations. This does not mean that we do not need teachers or that some places are not difficult to understand, rather it is an assurance that the Scripture alone is adequate for what is essential.

- Jesus said that "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me." (John. 5:39)
- Abraham declared that the brothers of the rich man had sufficient knowledge in the Scriptures to avoid torment: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." (Luke. 16:29)
- Paul repeatedly appealed to Scripture as his authority: "For what does the Scripture say?" (Romans 4:3). And to Timothy he wrote: "from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy. 3:15). In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 he says, "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"
- James quoted Scripture to settle an argument at the Jerusalem counsel (Acts 15:16-18).
- The Berean Christians were praised because they tested what Paul said with the Scriptures they possessed: "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).
- Revelation promises: "Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near." (Revelation. 1:3)

The sufficiency of Scripture is everywhere assumed. Never once did the apostles appeal to extra Biblical tradition, or an organization's interpretation as something needed to supplement it.

### Extra Biblical authority or traditions are condemned.

- "And in vain they worship Me, teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men.' *"For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men ..."*All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition... *"making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."* (Mark 7:8,9,13)
- *"Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?... you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition... And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."* (Matthew. 15:3,6,9)

Any religious system that that makes itself or its teachings equal to or above the authority of scripture is no different than the religious system of the Jews in Jesus' day whom He harshly condemned.

### The Question of Interpretation

Although all of the three groups mentioned above have access to the Bible, the followers are led to believe (either directly or indirectly) that they cannot understand it apart from the interpretation of the organization.

- Catholics need the church, the father's and the counsels' decisions.
- The Mormon's need the prophets and their other documents to expand upon or shed light on the Bible's teaching.
- The Jehovah's Witnesses need the direction of the organization and the explanations in *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines.

Though all profess that the Bible is the Word of God, in reality and practice *all place the Bible second to the organization's authority.*

It is the popular notion that people can make the Bible say anything they want. This would be true if there were no rules or guidelines for interpretation. The fact of the matter is that there are rules and through time most can learn how to apply these rules to become fairly proficient at interpretation.

To our shame, most of us would prefer to be told what the Bible says than make the effort to study it ourselves and so we are left with the interpretation of others to guide us.

*But our ignorance of proper interpretation does not change the authority of the Bible, nor does it mean that the Bible can be **made** to say anything. It only means we are ignorant of the methods of valid interpretation and so assume there are none.*

Notes: Jehovah's Witnesses

*Does the Watchtower really control people's thinking?*

Following are quotes from the literature of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, better known as the Jehovah's Witnesses organization. After reading the quotes below, it is obvious that the Watchtower discourages individual thinking among the Jehovah's Witnesses and requires them to submit to the teaching of the Watchtower organization.

- "Only this organization functions for Jehovah's purpose and to his praise. To it alone God's Sacred Word, the Bible, is not a sealed book". <sup>[11]</sup>
- "Thus the Bible is an organizational book and belongs to the Christian (JW) congregation as an organization, not to individuals, regardless of how sincerely they may believe that they can interpret the Bible". <sup>[12]</sup>
- "We should eat and digest and assimilate what is set before us, without shying away from parts of the food because it may not suit the fancy of our mental taste...We should meekly go along with the Lord's theocratic organization and wait for further clarification, rather than balk at the first mention of a thought unpalatable to us and proceed to quibble and mouth our criticisms and opinions as though they were worth more than the slave's provision of spiritual food. Theocratic ones will appreciate the Lord's visible organization and not be so foolish as to put against Jehovah's channel their own human reasoning and sentiment and personal feelings". <sup>[13]</sup>
- "It should be expected that the Lord would have a means of communication to his people on the earth, and he has clearly shown that the magazine called The Watchtower is used for that purpose". <sup>[14]</sup>
- "We all need help to understand the Bible, and we cannot find the Scriptural guidance we need outside the 'faithful and discreet slave' organization". <sup>[15]</sup>
- "From time to time, there have arisen from among the ranks of Jehovah's people those, who, like the original Satan, have adopted an independent, faultfinding attitude...They say that it is sufficient to read the Bible exclusively, either alone or in small groups at home. But, strangely, through such 'Bible reading,' they have reverted right back to the apostate doctrines that commentaries by Christendom's clergy were teaching 100 years ago...". <sup>[16]</sup>
- "We cannot claim to love God, yet deny his word and channel of communication". <sup>[17]</sup>
- "All who want to understand the Bible should appreciate that the "greatly diversified wisdom of God" can become known only through Jehovah's channel of communication, the faithful and discreet slave". <sup>[18]</sup>

## Basic Doctrine - The Bible

(L-3) - Other's Views on the Doctrine of Scripture

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### Footnotes:

- [1] (see D&C 68:4) *Gospel Principles* [an LDS publication], 52
- [2] "Gospel Principles", 52
- [3] *History of the Church*, 4:461 [an LDS publication] (*Gospel Principles*, 53)
- [4] in an LDS Conference Report, Oct. 1986, pp. 4-7; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, pp. 5-7
- [5] "Gospel Principles", 54
- [6] "Gospel Principles", 54
- [7] "Gospel Principles", 55
- [8] selections from his "History of the Church", and "The Articles of Faith" (*Gospel Principles*, 55)
- [9] "Gospel Principles", 55
- [10] "Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose", 22 [a JW publication]
- [11] "Watchtower", July 1, 1973, p. 402
- [12] "Watchtower", Oct. 1, 1967, p. 587
- [13] "Watchtower", Feb. 1, 1952, p. 79-80
- [14] 1939 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses, p. 85
- [15] "Watchtower", Feb. 15, 1981
- [16] "Watchtower", Aug. 15, 1981
- [17] "Watchtower", Oct. 1, 1967, p. 591
- [18] "Watchtower", Oct. 1, 1994, p. 8