
Words of Truth

Using The Bible For Pettifogging

By: Brian A. Yeager

Did you laugh at the title of this article? Are you grabbing your dictionary to find out what pettifogging is? Let me explain. As I was thinking of a title for this article I started with the word “trivial”. In studying synonyms for this word I found “pettifogging”. It is the best word for what I am writing about, but I would be shocked if many knew what “pettifogging” is. Let me give you the definition. Pettifogging is: “placing undue emphasis on petty details” (New Oxford American Dictionary). Now, we need to get on to the seriousness of our study.

Many people enjoy studying the Bible or asking Bible questions on matters that have little to nothing to do with their salvation. People love to talk about what angels look like. People love to ask about how Cain had a wife. People like to discuss and even debate about the order of kings in Israel. People love to be capable of naming, in order, the judges of Israel. I get questions about the lives of the Apostles. By such, I don't mean how they lived faithfully as examples, which is important (I Corinthians 11:1 and II Timothy 3:10), but questions about how many children they had, etc. What do these things really matter when it comes down to the salvation of your soul?

When Jesus told the Jews to search the Scriptures, it was in regard to matters of eternal life and the testimony of the Scriptures concerning Jesus Himself (John 5:39). When faithful men preached the Gospel, it was for salvation to be had for the hearer (Romans 1:16). When Paul, Peter, etc. wrote letters to Christians; they dealt with what was needed (Jude 1:3). There is no place at all, within all the pages of the word of God, wherein God had teachers focus on things that were petty. What was written or taught orally was what that particular audience needed to learn.

When you study the word of God for yourself, what are you looking to find? When you ask someone a biblical question, what are you looking to learn? Are you avoiding things you need to know for your salvation by seeking information that, in the “big picture”, really has little to no benefit in knowing? God tells us not to get caught up in these things.

Avoid These Questions

The word of God has several places wherein genealogies are emphasized (Numbers 1:18 and Nehemiah 7:5) for various reasons (Genesis 5:1-32, Genesis 10:1-32, Genesis 11:1-32, Genesis 22:20-24, Genesis 35:23-26, Exodus 6:14-27, Numbers 1:1-3:9, Numbers 26:1-65, Ruth 4:18-22, Luke 3:23-38, etc.). We understand that, for the purpose of knowing God kept His promise to Abraham (Genesis 22:18), we need to be able to trace Jesus back to Abraham. For this reason, we are given the Scriptural proof of such (Matthew 1:1-17).

The reason I bring this up is that, there are some things in the Scriptures such as

genealogies that matter, but not enough to spend considerable effort in learning or discussing. In fact, notice what the Lord says concerning such: *“But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain”* (Titus 3:9). Consider how this applies. There are many Scriptures that list genealogical information. However, those Scriptures have very little relevance to us today. Thus, much time spent therein is unprofitable and vain. Those are the terms our Lord used concerning such. Yet, there are people that spend countless hours studying, teaching, and arguing over these things. In so doing, they avoid the weightier matters (Matthew 23:23-24).

Notice what Paul wrote to Timothy the evangelist: *“As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm”* (I Timothy 1:3-7). There is no explanation needed in understanding the words you just read. The fact is, there are some things that are not worthy of our time when there are things that will impact our salvation that we should be much more concerned about.

Notice this instruction: *“But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness”* (I Timothy 4:7). Here, Paul told Timothy to refuse the myths of old wives. Don’t dive into these things. Brethren, the evidence is significant in that there are many things that are discussed of which we should take no part in. These questions arise to deter from the real matters of which we should be concerned. These discussions cause strife and such need to be avoided (II Timothy 2:23). We need to be concerned about and spend our time learning things that matter.

Things That Matter

Of course, all of the Scriptures matter (Romans 15:4, I Corinthians 10:1-12, and II Timothy 3:15-17). However, some have greater importance than others. Why would a person whom has not obeyed the Gospel of Christ study the Old Testament? Salvation, as it concerns us today, will not be found there (John 1:17, Acts 13:38-39, and Galatians 2:16). This point applies in many areas. Why would an alien sinner want to study the Holy Spirit when they have yet to obey Christ (II Thessalonians 1:7-9)? Why would a Christian, young in the faith, want to understand the plagues in the book of Revelation that have passed (Revelation 1:1-3) when they have yet to grasp how to live as a Christian (Titus 2:11-14)? You are not going to be judged on whether or not you can explain matters past. You will be judged on whether or not you are living according to matters presently expected of you (John 5:28-29).

Conclusion

Time is valuable. We should not be boastful of our time as though we always will have another day to prepare for the coming of Christ (James 4:13-16 and II Peter 3:9-14). We need to spend our Bible study time in rightly dividing what is significant to us today (II Timothy 2:15) rather than pursuing trivial matters which will not save or damn us in themselves. When you have a perfect grasp of what matters most, you can then get into that which matters less.

Milkshakes

How To Establish Authority

By: Brian A. Yeager

In our previous study we covered how that we need some form of guidance to keep us doing what is right. The Scriptures teach that whatsoever we do or say needs to be by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17). Now we need to work on how we arrive at that authority.

We have to understand that the word of God is not as simple as an Old Testament and a New Testament. Prior to the Law of Moses (Exodus 20:1ff.) man ruled over his own household with direction from the Lord (i.e. Genesis 12:1-13:14). After that, the Law of Moses took effect over Israel (Deuteronomy 4:4). If you were not a Jew, you were not under Moses' Law (Ephesians 2:11-14). Gentiles, during the time the Law of Moses was in effect, were a law unto themselves judging right and wrong from the conscience God gave them (Romans 2:12-15). This separation of Jew and Gentile and the two systems of rule remained in effect until John the baptizer came into the world. While the Law was still in effect at this time per se (Matthew 5:17-18), it had begun to change (Luke 16:16). You can see this clearly in what Jesus taught (i.e. Matthew 5:21-48). The Scriptures show us that Jesus took away the Law of Moses through His death on the cross (Acts 3:19-26, Romans 7:1-6, Colossians 2:8-14, and Hebrews 9:15-10:22). The Law of Moses now serves as merely an example to learn from (Romans 15:4 and I Corinthians 10:1-12), but not a law we are bound to (John 1:17, Acts 13:32-39, and Galatians 5:4). Now, we need to talk about how we can learn from the Law of Christ.

First, we learn what we are to do in pleasing God by doing what He commands or explicitly instructs us to do (John 14:15, John 15:14, I John 5:2-3, and Revelation 22:14). For example, God commands Christians to love one another (John 15:17) as Christ loved His disciples (John 13:34-35). That is not confusing. It is a command that requires we study the Lord's relationship with the twelve and love one another in a like manner.

Secondly, we learn what we are to do in pleasing God by doing what God shows us is right through approved examples to follow (I Corinthians 4:16, I Corinthians 11:1, I Peter 2:21, and I John 2:3-6). Paul showed this when he wrote of the example of Christ and the twelve in teaching about the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11:23-26; cf. Matthew 26:26-29).

A third way we can learn what is pleasing to God requires us to be capable of reason. Yes, learning about the will of God does require the ability to reason (Acts 17:2). This third way of learning is by us reasoning and inferring things not explicitly stated. Jesus taught this way by requiring the hearers to infer that there is life after death by saying that God is presently the God of three physically dead men (Matthew 22:23-32). We use this ability in communicating all of the time. It is not that hard. For example, if I am eating dinner at your house and after the first bite I get a disgusting look upon my face and spit the food into my napkin, what can you infer from that? Would you say that I liked that food? Clearly, not! There is no confusion here. It is a necessary inference [inescapable conclusion] - I didn't like the food.

There is more to cover, but this is a basic start to how we establish authority. Our next Milkshake will get a little chunkier as we discuss some applications of what we learned here.