

Standalone Lessons on Various Subjects
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From Mark 9:14-29. THE ISSUE OF ULTIMATE SOLUTIONS.

#1. A strategic question is posed by this text. The issue is this: Are the conditions of human temporal/material existence subject to ultimate solutions or not?

#2. The answer to the issue is a reference to either the efficacy of true belief or a disparagement of the temporal effects of biblical faith.

#3. The Lord encountered a voluble dispute, v.14. Jesus inquired as to its subject, v.16. The situation presented a setting for teaching eternal truth.

#4. An "unclean spirit" (v.25) had overtaken a man's son; "it seizes him", "slams him to the ground", "he foams at the mouth", he "grinds his teeth" (v.18), there were "convulsions" (v.20), he was "thrown... Into the fire and into the water" (v.22). The evil spirit was driven by a purpose; "to destroy him", v.22.

#5. The Lord's disciples could do nothing about it, v.17, 18. The disciples concluded that the situation was not subject to ultimate solutions. Does this not sound like a very contemporary opinion? The reason for the conclusion, said Jesus, was not the situational dynamics, rather, it was their weak faith. "...O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?'...", v.20.

#6. The Lord healed the boy, v.25, 26. The encounter was chosen by Jesus to prove *a point of faith*. In the clash between ultimate solutions and ultimate contradictions, the ultimate power resides with God.

#7. This truth is one of the hinge points of biblical faith. Belief in the power of God, or in a form of naturalism, gives some kind of perspective on human existence.

#8. However, Jesus favors the believer whose thought, speech and behavior are unalterably dependent upon ultimate solutions.

#9. "...All things are possible to him who believes", v.23. Only an unconstrained belief sees such unconstrained possibilities. Beyond human imagination!

From John 1:1-5. APPEARANCES and HUMAN ANALYSIS ARE UNRELIABLE.

#1. Without revealed truth, the human mind is fully dependent upon the report of appearances and human analysis with its heavy reliance upon measurement.

#2. But with the arrival of the Word of God, *all the rules of comprehension* are changed. The Bible records many episodes where the Word of God was not appreciated for that particular dynamic.

#3. These first 5 verses written by John generalize to the *rule of displacement*. Revealed propositional truth was given in order that belief in appearances and human analysis can be sufficiently displaced by faith.

#4. The Word of God overrules appearances and empiric analysis. If Scripture is not read in just this way, then, biblical faith does not, cannot develop.

#5. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God", v.1, 2.

#6. One of the immediate generalizations of those propositions is this: *The human mind, without the benefit of the Word of God, is in the controlling grip of a severe and irremediable disorientation.*

#7. "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being", v.3.

#8. The universe and every particle of it exist within the embrace of *a cause to effect relation*. More precisely stated, we are all living under the relation between the conscious causation of the Almighty and the *subsequents* that He governs.

#9. Meaning precedes matter, physics, physiology, situation, circumstance, events and states of being. Nothing is self-explanatory. Appearances and analysis fall short.

#10. We are always and only in the subsequent position. Men, in time, are not just collections of atoms and articulated molecules; we are the beneficiaries of His "life" and "the light", v.4. Believers, armed with revelation and belief in it, are stronger than world "darkness", v.5 --Good to know when the next trial shows up.

From James 3:1-12. THE DUALISM OF SELF-EXPRESSION.

#1. There are many forms of self-expression. The arts, literature, sports, teaching and language are among them. In fact, all behavior can be manifest of self-expression. But James centers our attention on "the tongue", v.5.

#2. James is candidly concerned about how believers lay hold of language and then push it into world conditions and circumstances.

#3. "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well"-- v.2.

#4. Language is the variable; but it is the person who determines whether the variable will be used for good or for wickedness (the dualism).

#5. Necessarily, awareness must catch up to *the disproportionate effects and power of the tongue*", v.3-5. It is small yet "boasts of great things".

#6. Linked to a corrupt soul, language is pure destruction. "And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity"... "defiles the entire body"... "sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell", v.6.

#7. In every situation, with family, friends and acquaintances, we are instruments of destruction and instability or manifestations of righteousness. The choice is ours.

#8. "Relationship problems" are readily recast as sins of the tongue. "...My brethren, these things ought not to be this way", v.10.

#9. Imagine, then, the power of the believer, who uses his/her tongue to push eternal truth, generalized biblical meanings into all and every situation and condition. This is the individual, who by spiritual management of soul, behavior and language imposes an absolute influence upon every human circumstance and condition. How shall we talk to ourselves in the struggles of this life?

From Acts 16:14, 15. THE SET AT NAUGHT IMPERATIVE.

#1. A businesswoman, originally from Thyatira, moves to Philippi to trade in the cloth business.

#2. She has her own concerns, obligations and responsibilities.

#3. She heads up a household.

#4. Notably, Lydia is "a worshiper of God". But, she does not know the gospel truth. A Sabbath dawns affording the moment in which Lydia learns of Christ for the first time, v.13.

#5. "And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay'. And she prevailed upon us", v.15.

#6. Lydia was being presented with the *design of faithfulness*. That had to transcend everything else she had previously thought.

#7. Paul began to speak "to the women who had assembled", v.13. Lydia "was listening", v.14. "...and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul".

#8. Nothing more is stated about the direct effect of the Lord upon Lydia's mind.

#9. This much we can know from the textual language. The opening of one's mind requires what can be called *a set-at-naught imperative*.

#10. If one is to respond to the gospel successfully, then one must set at naught all personal objections posed by the past, all existing obstacles to belief and obedience and all doubts regarding the efficacy of the word of God in relation to the human condition.

#11. This is the immediate imperative facing every believer regardless of the historical conditions or the times.

#12. If the Lord opens the mind, then, there is the immediate imperative to set at naught all contrarian thought, speech and behavior.

#13. The churches have not recognized and absorbed this imperative brought to mind by Lydia's time down by the "riverside". The result: confusion about the authority of Scripture and the melding of church and the world.

From Philippians 3:17-21. THE IMAGINARY GULF BETWEEN BELIEF and BEHAVIOR.

#1. Concerns about human behavior have become a planetary obsession. Personal behavior is politicized, psychologized, socialized and relativized.

#2. And someone, in one position or another, is terminally interested in controlling human behavior.

#3. The apostle contends that *behavior is rooted in what one believes*. "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us", v.17. This means that patterns of behavior emerge from that which one, confidently, believes to be true about reality.

#4. The textual language stipulates that there are two, large-ranging and inclusive sources of behavior.

#5. One is the belief that material/temporal existence is the sole determinant of personal behavior. The reference is to they "who set their minds on earthly things", v.19.

#6. By their behavior rooted in what they believe, the apostle nominates such people as "enemies of the cross of Christ", v.18; a most serious accusation.

#7. There is a profound distortion behind this; "whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite and whose glory is in their shame", v.19. The reality of God is vacated with them. This amounts to collective disaster.

#8. The other foundation is biblical faith. ""For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ", v.20.

#9. Belief is anchored in the God of the Bible and behavior is the expression of it. It is transformative and transcendent, v.21.

#10. Our behavior, as Christians, is consciously rooted in belief and trust in the power of God; "by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself".

#11. The two patterns of behavior are locked in conflict. Our "citizenship" is not here.