

March 31, 2024

The View

“Sir, we wish to see Jesus” - John 12:21

Welcome Visitors

Our goal at the Folsom church of Christ is to do everything according to God’s word, including respecting its silence. We are not a denomination, not part of anything larger than this local church; we have no earthly “headquarters.” The six elders oversee this church and, ultimately, we answer only to Christ. The comments you hear today are primarily for the benefit of our own members, as we examine Scripture and seek to be built up in our faith in Christ. If you don’t understand something, please do not hesitate to ask the preacher or one of the elders. We welcome and appreciate your comments and questions on any issue and especially if you see or hear anything that you feel does not correspond to God’s word. We are here to serve; please help us do that.

**Please fill out a visitor’s card and put it in the collection plate when it is passed.
We do not solicit donations from visitors. See page 4 for more information.**

Schedule

The Lord’s Day

9:30 AM Bible classes

Auditorium: A Study of Nehemiah (Review)

Young Adult Class (room 12): Romans

Room 15/16: Ladies Class: Psalms

10:30 AM Assembly

Preaching Today : Scott Gardner

Sermon: *“What More Can I Say?”*

Livestream at 9:30 & 10:30AM at <https://tinyurl.com/5f2cbm3y>

Bible Class: 5PM @ the Building

“Improving our worship through song” (Auditorium)

“Praying the Psalms” (Rooms 13/14)

High School Class, 5 PM - No class tonight—Sunday

*Young people monthly meeting (middle school): contact David Sanderson (david.r.sanderson@intel.com)
or Seth Reagan (sethreagan@gmail.com)*

There are several on-going Bible classes in the homes of members. Check with David Posey or one of the other elders if you would like to join one of those classes.

Wednesday 7PM @ Building

Classes: same as Sunday 9:30 AM

2nd Saturday Men’s Bible Study: 7 to 8 AM

Bel Air Market on Bidwell in Folsom.

“Iron sharpens iron” (Proverbs 27:17). Mentoring (Titus 2:1-6).

Articles published in the View reflect only the thoughts and opinions of the author alone, not necessarily the editor, the elders or any member of the church at Folsom.

All or Nothing at All

David Posey

How ingenious do we need to be to understand Scripture? How complicated has God made it for us to get the truth from the Bible? Has God played a trick on us and hidden His truth somewhere inside our Bibles, saving us only if we can find it? Is God engaged in some kind of cosmic board game in which we are the pawns?

There seems to be an insatiable desire on the part of some brethren to tolerate every shade and grade of doctrine, and the people who promote them (except those who are perceived as more restrictive than they, of course).

Vance Havner used to say, "They would turn God's sheepfold into a zoo." Instead of the church going into the world, to teach it, they would bring the world into the church. In order to accomplish this, however, it is necessary to minimize the force of some teachings, because they clearly form a line of distinction. An obvious example is homosexuality. In order to open our doors to practicing homosexuals, we must reinterpret, minimize or eliminate the passages that condemn such activity. On the other hand, if we observe these passages as they are written, we have no choice but to conclude that such people are excluded from the commonwealth of God's people and conduct ourselves accordingly (abhorring the sin, while pointing the sinner to Christ at every opportunity).

Reductionism ad nauseam

A manifestation of this attitude has been practiced in the mainline denominations for years. F. LaGard Smith mentions it in his scathing rebuke of some brethren in a speech given at the Pepperdine Lectures in April of this year. He refers to a Lutheran scholar's analysis of why Lutheranism has failed to advance as rapidly in recent years. The scholar calls the problem as "reductionism," meaning that the doctrine of a Lutheran is not couched in affirmations, but in a series of repudiations, or reductions. The purest form of this reductionism would be a "grace-only" doctrine in which God is viewed as completely responsible for salvation — man would have no part in it whatsoever. You'd be surprised how many denominations teach something very close to that idea.

Reductionism is common in most mainline churches today. I was speaking to a fellow the other day who is active in a group called "Promise-Keepers." This is a men's organization that is devoted to focusing on what members of various denominations have in common, instead of the differences. At a convention at Anaheim Stadium, the keynote speaker asked the crowd of 5,000 to yell out the name of the church they belong to. Of course, it sounded like the Tower of Babel, post-tongue confusion. But then the speaker asked them to yell out the name of the Savior. "Christ" was the predictable reply. Point... "don't you see, we are all saved by Christ, so what difference does it make what church we belong to?"

The doctrine of many denominations is best defined by what they don't believe: they don't believe homosexuality is wrong, they don't believe a woman's public role in the church should be restricted, they don't believe anything that could be viewed as "restricting fellowship." Theologically, the goal is to refrain from placing any human (as they see it) restriction on God's exercise of His grace. The result is that they have flung their doors wide open, accepting anyone who will accept them. They ignore references to Christ as Lord (He's just our Savior, not our Master) and have reduced ethical concerns primarily to social issues ("you should feed the poor" is relevant, "you should avoid fornication" is not).

Boy, you say, these denominations' buildings must be overflowing, huh? Actually, mainline denominations have lost an unprecedented number of members in the last 20 years (something like a 25% drop). Maybe people really do expect religion to stand for something. Novel idea.

"We have met the enemy. . ."

My concern is not with the denominations, though. I'm seeing this "reductionism" attitude practiced by some of my brethren. In other words, some are saying that we are applying God's word too restrictively and are not leaving room for God's grace to work. This is done by reducing the basis of fellowship to a few well-accepted, rarely controverted, abstract truths that we glean from Scripture.

There's an obvious problem with this approach. The Bible makes no clear distinction in the quality of "truths" to be believed. There is reference to "weightier matters," justice and mercy and faithfulness, in Matthew 23:23, but that hardly settles the question because commitment to Christ isn't mentioned explicitly in that passage. Not only that, but Jesus said they were "weightier matters of the law" and was speaking to Jews at the time. Furthermore, in the same passage, Jesus told them to do those "weightier matters" without leaving the "little things" undone. I don't know anyone who has proposed that we put all of our religious eggs in the Matthew 23:23 basket. But it illustrates the problem. We're faced with the fact that the Bible makes no clear distinction between truths we must keep and truths we must ignore.

So, those who like the reductionism idea because it reduces the judgments we must make about who we can be in fellowship with (cf. I Corinthians 5:9-13), are faced with coming up with a crystallization of a few crucial truths that everyone must agree on. And, of course, even among the reductionists, there is disagreement on this point. Most are reluctant to embrace the Promise Keeper approach (which they don't even practice) that it is just a belief in Christ as Savior that matters. Some think Ephesians 4:4-6 is the place to go, but are tripped up by "one faith" — what does that include? (some brethren are also tripped up by "one baptism").

I'm not suggesting that there isn't a sense in which some of God's words tend to shape us into the kind of people He wants and therefore take a more central position in our

lives, in the long term, than the words that fill a merely restrictive role. The word "love" is an obvious example. If we love (God, wife, child, brethren) we "fulfill the law" (Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 13:8-10; cf. I Timothy 1:5-11). But to reduce all of God's words to the word "love" goes beyond what God has done Himself. Why not understand that the rest of God's word helps us define what "love" means and therefore is just as valuable?

The problem is presumption

To conclude that God's other words are not important is presumption placed in bold relief. "Presumption," as I'm using the term, means assuming something without God's word on the matter. Nadab and Abihu used a strange fire, which the Lord had not commanded (Leviticus 10:1ff.). If that is not a lesson about presumption, I don't what is.

The presumption of some brethren is displayed in the some of the answers being offered to resolve the dilemma noted above about which of God's words should form the "core gospel." Here are some samples: (1) "Only commands are important, not examples or inferences." Presumption: How do you know that? If you know that a divinely-inspired apostle did a thing a certain way (for example, gave specific instructions for qualifications for elders or took the Lord's Supper on a certain day every week), who are you, when faced with the identical situation, to question the apostle's judgment in the matter? Upon what basis can we assume that Christ will accept a different kind of service, when one of His appointed men has spoken on the matter, whether I learn that through command, example or a necessary conclusion that I draw from reading about the act? At a more personal level, what examples or necessary inferences are these brethren wanting to ignore, and why?

(2) "Only the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are essential for Christians to heed; the letters are, at most, 'good advice.'" Who told you that? What passage in any part of Scripture — whether determined by command, example or necessary inference — would lead you to such a conclusion? Yes, on a couple of occasions, Paul said something like "I say this, not the Lord" (e.g., I Corinthians 7:12; cf. 7:6; II Corinthians 11:17). From that statement, would you conclude that everything Paul says is just his own opinion? Logically, that's absurd. Even if we grant that Paul, in I Corinthians 7:12, etc., is saying something like "this is my opinion, not the Lord's, and therefore you can take it or leave it" (hardly the most obvious interpretation to begin with), logically that disclaimer would apply only to the statement that follows, and Paul would then be asserting that everything else he says is from the Lord (cf. 7:10).

But a more fundamental question is whether the letters constitute Scripture or not? If they are not, then they are not even "good advice," because the men writing them claim to be writing God's words (see Ephesians 3:1ff.). If they are not, it's a cruel ruse. If they are Scripture, then doesn't II Timothy 3:16-17 apply and mean that we are to use them for doctrine, reproof, correction, and discipline? "But Paul was referring only to the Old Testament in that passage." Oh? So what is the basis for accepting the gospels but not the letters? They were written by some of the same men, and some of the gospels were written later than some of the letters. John wrote a gospel and three letters and a prophecy — was he only inspired while writing his gospel and the rest is "good advice"? How do we separate the "gospel-Scripture" from "letter-Scripture"? And what would you say to Peter who called Paul's epistles "Scripture" (II Peter 3:16)? Upon what logical, scriptural — or any other — basis would you arrive at such a conclusion? And why? What is in the letters that bothers these brethren? Don't you see? The reductionists know all too well what the letters say and require, and they don't like it. They are too restrictive and they don't want to be restricted.

Can we expect some of these brethren to soon embrace the Jesus Seminar mentality in which only certain words of Jesus in the gospels are accepted as valid? The Jesus Seminar consists of a group of scholars who meet in order to attempt to determine which of the words written down in our gospels are truly the words of Jesus and which have been put there by the early church. I won't even get into the means they employ to do this; suffice to say that it is wholly subjective, as you might have guessed. My point is, that here is "reductionism" in extremis. What is preventing those who accept any of it to go all the way with it? Why not?

It seems clear enough that this whole effort to reduce the basis of our faith to the lowest common denominator is an effort to assert the Self into defining the parameters of faith, instead of trusting God to do it. Instead of surrendering ourselves completely to the will of the Lord, we set out to choose what part of the will we will comply with. Ironically, though some would stress the words of Jesus over the words of the apostles, their attitude is condemned by the Lord Himself: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matthew 16:24).



Read your Bible