

# PIRSpective

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## A Baptist Catechism with Commentary. Q1.

By William R. Downing

**Question 1:** *What is the only inspired, infallible and inerrant truth for man?*

**Answer:** *The only inspired, infallible and inerrant truth for man is the inscripturated Word of God, the Bible.*

**2 Tim. 3:16-17.** 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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

**Matt. 4:4.** ...It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

See also: **Heb. 1:1-3; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; 3:15-16.**

### COMMENTARY

The Bible is our sole rule of both faith [belief, doctrine] and practice [life]. The Scripture is our one objective source of truth and knowledge, and our standard for proper living because it is the very Word of God inscripturated. It is through the Scriptures that we have a true knowledge of God, ourselves and universe about us. We may know much about God from his creation and from our own instinctive thought-process, as we have been created in God's image and likeness [natural revelation]. But God's moral self-consistency [his absolutely righteous character], his redemptive love, his grace and mercy, and other necessary moral characteristics can be known only through the redemptive history inscripturated in his Word [special revelation]. It is in the Scriptures alone that we find salvation from sin, hope of deliverance in the active and passive obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ; true, objective reconciliation with God, and the certainty of hope for the future. Nature may cheer us with its beauties and wonders; we may have high and lofty thoughts in our imaginations, but only in the Scriptures do we find the heart of God revealed and discover the glory and sweetness of the gospel.

Further, we must understand that the Fall has affected the thought-processes of man, and his perception of spiritual realities is either very limited or distorted by nature [the noetic effects of sin, Cf. Rom. 1:21-22; Eph. 4:17-19]. Finally, what truth man does know to any extent, he seeks to suppress, as it aggravates his mind, convicts his conscience and sets itself against his natural and sinful presuppositions (Rom. 1:18-20). The Scripture does not reveal everything (Deut. 29:29), but it does reveal sufficiently what we need to know: that we are sinners before God, how to have forgiveness of sins, how to be reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, live acceptably before him in this life and prepare ourselves for eternity. It is through the Scriptures alone that we have a consistent Theistic Christian world-and-life view, a valid Christian experience and a transcendent, yet practical faith.

Believing that the Bible is the very Word of God inscripturated is not merely theoretical or abstract. It is the substance of a living

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faith which rests in the truth of God's Word regardless of circumstances. Such belief is not mere fideism [a bare irrational faith]. The witness of the Holy Spirit authenticates this Word to the mind, heart and soul of the believer. Its commandments, prophecies, warnings and promises are wholly and infallibly true. The Scriptures are to form the very fabric of our lives.

Many may disavow Christianity because they cannot believe in the miraculous, or presume that there are inconsistencies in the Christian system. They object to the "unreasonableness" of the resurrection, or to the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, or to his Virgin Birth, etc. These realities are never the real issue. The primary issue is that God has spoken plainly and with absolute authority to man, and this record has been inscripturated [written down]. The real issue is ever the veracity of God in and through the Bible. The Scriptures are his Word, and we are either obedient or disobedient to them and to him.

## The Use of a Catechism

By William R. Downing

### SCRIPTURES

**Deuteronomy 4:9-10** <sup>9</sup> Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; <sup>10</sup> *Specially* the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and *that* they may teach their children.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9** <sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: <sup>5</sup> And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. <sup>6</sup> And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: <sup>7</sup> And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. <sup>8</sup> And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. <sup>9</sup> And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** <sup>16</sup> All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: <sup>17</sup> That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

**Ephesians 6:4** <sup>4</sup> And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

### THE TERM CATECHIZE

The English word “catechism” is derived from the Greek verb *katēchēō*, “to resound, teach orally, instruct by mouth.” This term originally had the idea of “speaking down or from above” i.e., from actors on an elevated stage. It is a compound of the preposition *kata*, “down, throughout, thoroughly” and the verb *ēcheō*, “to sound,” the source of our English word, “echo.” There seems to be in this etymology the idea of a responsive answer. Catechizing has the connotation of thorough or repeated oral instruction, and is only one of several related terms for instruction of teaching found in Scripture. The term itself occurs eight times in the New Testament:

“That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou *hast been catechized*.” Luke 1:4.

“This man *had been constantly catechized* in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord...” Acts 18:25.

“And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, *being constantly catechized* out of the law...” Romans 2:18.

“Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might *catechize* others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.” 1 Cor. 14:19.

“Let him who is *being catechized* in the word communicate unto him who *catechizes* in all good things.” Gal. 6:6.

### C. H. SPURGEON ON CATECHIZING

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) was the pastor of the London Metropolitan Tabernacle congregation for thirty years, the largest evangelical church in the world at that time. He was a Baptist, strong in doctrine, amazing in influence and prolific in writings. He was always intensely gospel-oriented and extremely practical. He remains the most published and widely read author in Christian history. His remarks in the introduction to the issuance of a catechism for his own people bear close scrutiny and ought to be a great encouragement to revive the use of a sound catechism in our day:

“In matters of doctrine you will find orthodox congregations frequently changed to heterodoxy in the course of thirty or forty years, and that is because, too often, there has been no catechizing of the children in the essential doctrines of the Gospel. For my part, I am more and more persuaded that the study of a good scriptural catechism is of infinite value to our children....Even if the youngsters do not understand all the questions and answers....yet, abiding in their memories, it will be of infinite service when the time of understanding comes, to have known these very excellent, wise and judicious definitions of the things of God...It will be a blessing to them—the greatest of all blessing...a blessing in life and death, in time and eternity, the best of blessings God Himself can give.... I am persuaded that the use of a good catechism in all our families will be a great safeguard against the increasing errors of the times, and therefore I have compiled this little manual...for the use of my own church and congregation. Those who use it in their families or classes must labour to explain the sense to the little ones; but the words should be carefully learned by heart, for they will be understood better as the child advances in years.”

### THE PRACTICALITY OF A CATECHISM

The practical use of a catechism may be summarized in the following considerations: First, Catechizing is a scriptural practice. It is taught in both the Old and New Testaments by both precept and example. Many may have a general knowledge of the Bible, but greatly lack in the ability to reason from the Scriptures in a doctrinally consistent fashion. Second, We must know the Bible doctrinally and must know our doctrine biblically. Unless we arrive at a consistent doctrinal knowledge of the Scriptures, our knowledge of the Word of God is both deficient and defective. The use of a catechism leads one to think both scripturally and doctrinally. It is a very basic and necessary introduction to Bible doctrine and to elementary theology. Third, such a work is meant to educate the entire family. The catechism to be studied in this series of articles is a catechism with a commentary attached to discuss the various aspects of doctrine and its application to the life. Comments are meant for parents and older students as a means of educating themselves in basic Bible doctrine. The notes are meant to serve as a basis for family instruction and discussion of biblical truth. Questions and answers are followed by one or more proof-texts, and should be memorized with the question and answer. As to methodology, it is suggested that fathers instruct their children in the questions, answers and proof-texts, and then discuss the issues involved. Little children may be able only to memorize the questions and answers, while older children will be able to memorize one or more Scripture references. Those who are older can also begin to assimilate the issues involved.

## Some Objections Against Catechizing Answered

By William R. Downing

**OBJECTION ONE:** Why, as Baptists, use a catechism? Do not catechisms belong only to the Romanists, Lutherans or Reformed Christians? We have only one creed—the Bible! We will not and cannot put any literature on par with the Scriptures, or add to the Word of God in any way. **ANSWER:** Catechizing, or repetitive oral instruction is scriptural. It was given by Divine mandate in the Old Testament and is ratified in the New Testament by inspired Apostolic example (Cf. Deut. 4:9–10; 6:4–9; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16–17; Eph. 6:4. For the term “catechize” in the NT, Cf. Lk. 1:4; Acts 18:25; Rom. 2:18; 1 Cor. 14:19; Gal. 6:6. The Greek term is usually translated as

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## Baptist Doctrine and Distinctives. Part 1.

By Jim Billings

### INTRODUCTION

The general attitude of Christendom and the world concerning the Baptists throughout the centuries is not better stated anywhere than by the invectives found in the writings of the great Lutheran Church historian, John Laurence Mosheim. In his various descriptions against them he betrays his honest opinions and feelings throughout his work by using every defamatory adjective available concerning the German Ana-Baptists. He characterized them as a wrongheaded, a hotheaded, dangerous, deluded, fanatical, chimerical, tumultuous, seditious, furious, ferocious, pestilential, heretical, rebellious, turbulent, odious, pernicious, wild, savage, detestable, flagitious, mad, insane, delirious, miserable rabble of wretches, a motley tribe of enthusiasts, mad-men and monsters, who all sober people abhorred, and whom the magistrates found it necessary to put to the most miserable deaths, for the safety of the Church and the peace of the land. These statements are indicative of the general prejudice against all believers who have held to the New Testament as their only rule or standard for faith and practice since the time of our Lord (Is. 8:20; Matt. 4:4; Jn. 17:17; Rom. 4:3; Acts 17:11; II Tim. 3:16-17).

### THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The link that has held all Baptists together these past two thousand years is the nature of the New Testament Church. The study of Baptist doctrines and distinctives is found exclusively in the New Testament. A study of the witness and history of the Baptists will reveal their commitment to the New Testament as the only rule for faith and practice. Jesus stated, *“And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter (Πέτρος, a pebble, rock, or stone), and upon this rock (πέτρα, a mass of rock which points to the Lord Jesus Christ) I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”* (Matt. 16:18).

This statement by our Lord reveals true church perpetuity. The true New Testament Church was instituted by Jesus Christ in Galilee and since then, it can be argued, there has been established New Testament churches scattered throughout the world in every generation without interruption (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 3:10-11, 21; 5:25-27). Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, the chief corner stone.

New Testament churches are local assemblies of believers (ἐκκλησία, an assembly called out to a public meeting, an assembly of Christians gathered for worship). Our Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples used the term, ἐκκλησία according to the *usus loquendi* (i.e., the common language of the day). Thus, a general definition of a New Testament church is a voluntary association of believers bound together for the maintenance of the ordinances of the Church and the spread of the Gospel, independent of all outside authorities and associations, which answers to Christ alone, through the inscripturated Word of God. This principle of the nature of the New Testament Church is found throughout every generation since the time of our Lord.

In summation, the truth concerning the nature and perpetuity of the Church articulated by Jesus Christ to Peter implies several facts: 1. The church consists of a local visible body of believers. 2. The Church has always existed based on the promise of Jesus Christ and the explicit and implicit statements in the letters of Paul to the Ephesian church (Matt. 16:18; Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 3:10-11, 21; 5:25-27). 3. The church exists constantly and visibly and, therefore, is constantly and faithfully promulgating the truth of the

Gospel through its purity and sound doctrine. 4. The church cannot promulgate error, but must necessarily be the pillar and ground of the truth.

### THE CHURCH—THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

Each Local Church stands or falls on its faithfulness to the New Testament for its continued existence. Churches, from the time of our Lord, can only be true churches if, by definition, they are “the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15). This is the great burden that was placed on Paul, Timothy, and all others after them. “The church of the living God is the pillar and foundation to maintain the truth.” The word “truth” ἀληθείας can be translated “truth” or “reality.” This passage teaches us that God’s truth or reality is not dependant on the church, its pillar and foundation. His truth is absolute and unchanging and he has ordained His church to be its pillar and foundation. The church, through her agency, defends the truth and spreads it through the preaching ministry and the lives of its people. Faithfulness to this principle is paramount to all New Testament Christians. The fundamental basis for all true New Testament Christianity is that the Bible is the only rule for faith (i.e., what Christians are to believe) and practice (i.e., how Christians are to live) (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). “The church of the living God is the pillar and foundation to maintain the truth.” This is what distinguishes true New Testament churches from the Church of Rome. The Roman Catholic Church declares it is superior to the Word of God as an institution and by tradition. Their 1994 Catechism states under question 85, “The task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.” Cardinal Robert Bellarmine stated, “Tradition alone is sufficient, but the scriptures are not sufficient.”

True New Testament Christians have always chosen to shed their own blood rather than contradict the sole sufficiency of the Word of God for their rule for faith and practice. Countless millions of Christians have been martyred for their faithfulness to the doctrine of the local, visible body of believers, believer’s baptism, the Lord’s Supper, freedom of conscience, religious liberty for all, and a true missionary spirit from the first century to the present. They did and do this without submitting to any extra-biblical authority presiding over them.

### DEFINITION OF THE TERMS “BAPTIST” AND “ANABAPTIST”

The basic, historical definition of a “Baptist” or a “New Testament believer,” since the days of the Apostles, is one who holds to the following: 1. The Scriptures are the only rule for faith and practice. 2. Salvation is by grace alone. 3. A credible profession of faith must precede baptism. 4. Baptism is by immersion. 5. Baptism precedes voluntary membership into an assembly of believers. 6. The local assembly is an autonomous body of believers. 7. Church discipline after the pattern of the New Testament. 8. Submission to all state authority. 9. Liberty of Conscience.

Baptists do not assert that primitive New Testament Christians were called Baptists. They were first called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26). Not until the third century did they begin to take the names of their spiritual leaders or the region in which they lived. What bind New Testament believers, whether they are called Baptist, Cathari, or Waldenses are the principles to which we all hold as non-negotiable. That is, the precise model for all true New Testament churches from the time of our Lord is the historical record of the apostolic churches which are chronicled in the scriptures. The term “Ana-Baptist” is a slanderous term given to our fathers because of the felonious charge of re-baptizing individuals.

## The Fruits of the Study of History

By Michael A. Carling

In 1Corinthians 10, the Apostle Paul warned the saints at Corinth not to be ignorant of the past experiences of the fathers in the wilderness. He showed from the history of the people of God that the enjoyment of high privilege does not guarantee final blessing. In chapter ten of his epistle, Paul provided *An Analogy from the Past* in verses 1-5; *Examples from the Past* in verse 6-10; and *An Admonition Not to Repeat the Errors From the Past* in verses 11-14. My desire, in this inaugural PIRSpective article on church history, is to show from 1Corinthians 10:11 that the fruits of the study of history can be a present reality.

After referring to certain events from the past either directly or indirectly in verses 6-10, Paul then told his readers at Corinth that the lessons from these events ought not to be forgotten, and were in fact present admonitions for them. He wrote in verse 11, *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.* These “things,” or the cumulative lessons of each historical event, were examples for the Israelites. These historical events were also written down so that the saints at Corinth might be admonished by them. For instance, note the example provided in verse 9 where Paul reminded his readers of the historical event recorded in Numbers 21:4-9. The Israelites spoke against God and Moses, and bemoaned their lack of water and their loathing of the daily provision of manna. God reacted to this rebellion by sending fiery serpents among the people. These snakes bit the people and many of the people of Israel died. After beseeching the LORD for relief from the serpents, God answered Moses’ request by stating, *Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived* (Num. 21:8-9). Paul’s lesson for the Corinthians was, Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents (1Cor. 10:9). Don’t tempt Christ. Don’t “over test” His indulgence, for of the ones who did this very thing in the wilderness, many died. In other words, Paul told the saints at Corinth to learn from this historical event and not tempt Christ. Some of the members of the Corinthian church were dabbling in idolatry and other sinful activities, and by doing so were testing the Lord. In addition, Paul warned them not to lust after evil things, as they (the Israelites) also lusted; neither be idolaters, as were some of the Israelites; neither commit fornication, as some of the Israelites committed; neither murmur as some of the Israelites murmured and were destroyed of the destroyer. Paul took advantage of the history of the Israelites and used it as an object lesson. If his readers could learn from the errors of the fathers in the wilderness, then their study of history would bear good fruit.

All of those past events which happened to the Israelites would have been recorded in vain if their admonitions and warnings were to go unheeded. That is why Paul wrote under inspiration *...they are written for our admonition.* Paul admonished them to learn from the past and not to think that they were immune from the severe chastisement of Almighty God. He affirmed this by stating, *wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall* (1Cor. 10:12). Paul even reminded them in chapter eleven that they were not immune by the very fact that they were punished for their abuse of the Lord’s Supper. Paul called to remembrance,

*For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep* (1Cor. 11:30). The word “sleep” here is a euphemism for death. God killed many of the Corinthians for their abuse of the Lord’s Supper.

At the time that Paul was writing his letter to the Corinthians under inspiration, it was them *upon whom the ends of the world are [had] come* (1Cor. 10:11c). The words “are come” are from the Greek root *καταντάω* (a combination of *κατα*, “down from” or “according to” and a derivative of *άντι*, “over against, opposite to,” and at times with the connotation of “face-to-face”). For the Corinthians, they had come “face-to-face” with the culmination of the ages. They were at that time the recipients and caretakers of redemptive history and were living what was then the beginnings of Christianity. They were standing on the edge of the future, as it were, anticipating the unfolding of God’s providence.

In this present age, in the year of our Lord 2008, the elect of God are to take advantage of the examples of the past as well. All that the past ages can teach us is to bear its fruit in us. All of history has brought us to this point. It is now us upon whom the ends of the world have come. We, as the Corinthians did in their time, are standing “face-to-face” with the culmination of the ages. We are currently the recipients and caretakers of redemptive history. As the Corinthian saints learned from the Israelites, we can learn from the Corinthians. In fact we have both the history of the Israelites and the history of the New Testament churches from which to learn. We also have in our possession some two thousand years of church history as well as the completed cannon of Scripture. With all of this in our possession, we ought not to commit the same errors nor champion the same heresies of ages gone by. The fruits of history (or that which can be learned and applied) can be a present reality, but only if we take advantage of it. We must read and study the Scriptures primarily, and also read and study church history if the fruit of the knowledge obtained thereby is to bear its fruit in us and in our generation.

Lord willing, as we explore together various aspects of church history in future articles, may we learn from the past and use these lessons to better serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in this present age.

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## Christianity is Not a Crutch for the Weak

By Mark Bailon

There are many texts in the Scripture that one might adduce to establish that Christianity is not a crutch for the weak. But Matthew 11 is certainly not one of them. However, if we take the time to understand its logic, it is one that will do the job nicely. The whole of chapter 11 causes the casual reader to dismiss the chapter as unsuitable to the task. What causes the most concern is verse 12. There, the verb *βιάζομαι*, to use or apply force, is particularly hard to translate because it is not clear whether to render it in the passive or middle voice. Moreover, *βιάζομαι* may be used in a positive or negative sense, in the literature called *in bonem partem* and *in malam partem*,<sup>1</sup> respectively. To make matters worse, the word is used only here and in Luke 16:16 where most agree that it appears in the middle voice. Whether it is used *in bonem partem* or *in malam partem* depends upon the interpretation of the whole passage. In Matthew 11, virtually all English translations construe *βιάζομαι* in the passive and *in malam partem*. “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth

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*Not a Crutch continued from page 4...*

violence, and the violent take it by force.” Interestingly enough, the NIV translates the verb as a middle. “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been *forcefully advancing*, and forceful men lay hold of it.” This middle voice is like the active voice, except that rather than emphasize the action of the verb, it “calls attention to the agent as some way closely concerned with the action” of the verb.<sup>2</sup> The middle voice, then, places emphasis on the kingdom as an advancing force. And in this view βιάζομαι is interpreted *in bonem partem*. Are the NIV translators justified in their interpretation, contrary to the old, and not so old, standards? Turning to the commentaries and standard reference works reveals one truism: words like βιάζομαι must be translated on the basis of their basic meaning and, most importantly, according to the context wherein they are found. Thus, figuring out the meaning of a passage becomes the major task in helping to translate problematic words.

Matthew depicts the Baptist and the kingdom of heaven as the focal points of this passage. He makes his statement in verse 12 regarding the kingdom of heaven in the context of John’s relationship to that Kingdom. After answering the question put to Him by John’s disciples, our Lord turns as John’s disciples leave and begins to address the crowd. In a short sequence of rhetorical questions that escalate in intensity<sup>3</sup> and culminate in the significant revelation that John is the most important man in history our Lord builds His case. Accordingly, our Lord asks the people, “What did you go out to the desert to gaze upon? A reed being shaken to and fro by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in delicacies?<sup>4</sup> Behold! Those that wear delicate clothing are found in King’s houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, indeed, and I say to you and greater than a prophet.” That John is greater than a prophet has everything to do with his mission to put the people of Palestine in readiness for the coming Kingdom. He prophesied of and preached in the very Kingdom he helped our Lord inaugurate, in fulfillment of prophecy. The prophets before him actively foretold of the coming Kingdom, and the Scripture, characteristically called the law, preserved the prophecies for the future. But John embarks on his mission manifesting that this future is now. Our Lord is making the point that John holds a unique position among the prophets of God. Therefore, “among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist.” Nevertheless, it is important to note that the greatest in the Kingdom of Earth is not even equal to the least in the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is this juxtaposition of John as the promised messenger (in fact, as Elijah, who was to come, verse 14) and citizenship in the Kingdom that shifts our Lord’s thinking towards the inchoate kingdom itself. Christ’s ministry of healing diseases and exorcising demons was surely done in an intense and violent battle against the effects of sin and the activities of the devil. And the struggle against the forces of darkness and indwelling sin and corruption in the effort to establish the Kingdom of Light in a Kingdom of Darkness is undertaken with a show of force. Moreover, considering the kingdom of heaven in this light, one might propose<sup>5</sup> that our Lord is very likely alluding to the spiritual commotion that pervaded the region when he refers to John as a reed shaken by the wind. This kingdom of heaven, then, is a “force advancing and making its way with triumphant force.”

In addition to this forward motion of the kingdom into the world and unto all men, “forceful men lay hold of it.” It is not difficult to integrate the rendering of this last clause into the context of this chapter as some suppose. This rendering pairs nicely with

our interpretation of βιάζομαι in the middle voice. Our Lord is observing that the faithful respond positively to the kingdom demands to repent and believe. The criticism of the people in verses 16-19 and the scathing rebuke in verses 20-24 contrasts the unbelieving with both the kingdom and the faithful. Even though the kingdom is advancing the unrepentant oppose it while the believers embrace it. Indeed, they eagerly take hold of it and take it by force.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, the passage presupposes that those who would enter the Kingdom of Heaven must do so with determination and a resolve that is uncompromising. It is both advancing as a force in Palestine and is embraced by men and women who are determined to make it to heaven. This zeal of the faithful for the Kingdom contrasts the unbelieving and unrepentant religious establishment who hold the Kingdom and its King in disdain. Hence, we have the statement, “and from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven advances forcefully and the violent take it by force.” Not quite a religion for the faint of heart.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Lit. in a good direction (way) and in a bad direction (way), respectively.
- <sup>2</sup> Moulton, James Hope, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1 Prolegomena (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1934) p. 153. Cf. “The use of voice is to direct attention to the subject, not the object.” A.T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934) p 804.
- <sup>3</sup> Our Lord uses the strong adversative conjunction ἀλλά, to delineate the sequence.
- <sup>4</sup> Here the adjective μαλακοῖς is used as a noun.
- <sup>5</sup> In pointing out the well-know difficulties of translating and interpreting Matthew 11, Dr. Allison offers this assessment: “Clearly any interpretation will have to be offered with appropriate modesty.” ICC, *Commentary on Matthew*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999) p. 254
- <sup>6</sup> This view of believers is consistent with Luke 13:24 and Philippians 2:12. Luke has Ἀγωνίζεσθε εἰσελθεῖν διὰ τῆς στενῆς θύρας I.e., Agonize to enter in through the narrow gate. Paul admonishes Christians to see their salvation through to its logical conclusion. μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε. Literally, with fear and trembling, your own salvation, carefully work it out. See also, 1 Peter 1:9.

## Essential Texts for a Biblical Approach to Apologetics. 2 Corinthians 10:1-4.

By Paul S. Nelson

**2 Corinthians 10:1-5** Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence *am* base among you, but being absent *am* bold toward you: But I beseech *you*, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

This article is the first in a series that will survey essential biblical texts relating to the subject of apologetics. As Christians, we hold Scripture to be the inspired word of God. It has absolute authority over all our reasoning, and is the ultimate standard for the interpretation of all reality – including the universe and all facts of nature. The enterprise of apologetics cannot ignore, devalue, or exempt itself from this great and grand presupposition of the Christian faith. If our approach to apologetics is not scriptural, then it will not be pleasing to God, nor blessed of Him, and therefore we have no reason to believe it will ever succeed. The texts we will survey should establish a biblical foundation for our approach and method of apologetics.

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The first text I want to examine is 2 Corinthians 10:1-4 (above). In this vivid passage, the apostle Paul likens defending the faith to warfare. Indeed apologetics is spiritual warfare – *for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places* (Eph. 6:12). Paul is ready to wage war and he uses strong military metaphor to highlight four aspects of defending the faith: **rules of engagement, weapons, military strategy, and prisoners of war.**

There are **rules of engagement** in every military battle. Paul tells us what the Christian's rules of engagement are, '*Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.*' Paul's rule for conducting this military campaign is humility. Paul would imitate the behavior of his Lord, for the very character of Christ was *meekness and gentleness*. *Meekness* (πραΰτης) has to do with inward virtue, a condition of the heart and mind, and *gentleness* (ἐπιεικείας) is the outward expression of it, or the outward conduct. In the Greek there is only one definite article that puts these two together as a unit. This character, *meekness and gentleness*, marks the rules of apologetic engagement for the Christian. The Christian is to be humble.

Paul's opponents did not use the same rules of engagement. They conducted a smear campaign. They maligned and misrepresented Paul's humble behavior. They accused him of being a weakling and a coward. Further, they accused him of *walking after the flesh*, and tried to discredit his authority as an apostle. The world looks upon humility, kindness, and graciousness as weaknesses. They are vulnerable areas for manipulation and something to be taken advantage of. However, they are not weaknesses to the Christian, but rather a display of spiritual strength and self-control. The spiritual marks of a mature Christian defending the faith are patience, long suffering, kindness, and gentleness. This is what gives Christianity its beauty! *The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth* (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

**Weapons** are the second aspect in this battle to consider. In vv. 3-4, Paul states negatively, '*we do not war after the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal.*' Christians do not depend upon human weapons. Paul did not rely upon human reasoning, his power of argument, or enticing words of man's wisdom. Paul did not rely upon the worldly philosophies of empiricism, naturalism, nor the scientific method. On the contrary, Paul's weapons were *mighty through God*. His confidence was in the supernatural power of God. Paul would pull down the strongholds by divine power.

We must realize that the conflict is a spiritual warfare between the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of darkness. Spiritual warfare presupposes the utter necessity of prayer and the employment of the absolute authority of God's word. Christians must arm themselves by putting on the full armor of God as revealed to us in Eph. 6:10-20. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places* (v.12). The primary offensive weapon is *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (v.17).

Third, let us consider the **military strategy**. It is an offensive strategy alluding to different stages of a military campaign in ancient siege warfare. Three stages are mentioned with three dependent participles (vv.5-6); destroying defensive fortifications, taking captives and punishing resistance when the city is brought into

submission. Paul identifies the enemy's strongholds as *imagination*s and *every high thing* that opposes the knowledge of God. The Greek word for *imagination*s (λογισμούς) means *logical arguments* or *reasonings*. There is no definite article, which means that it is not a specific kind of reasoning, but any and all such human reasoning is included - all the world's thought patterns, opinions, and philosophies. The opponents' fortresses are the various intellectual arguments that humans construct to resist the truth of the gospel. It is a battle against the world's presuppositions and belief-systems. Further, '*every high thing*' (ὕψωμα) is another military term alluding to high towers and the great height of the fortress. It is used figuratively of man's pride and arrogance concerning human reasoning. Unregenerate man sets up his fortress of reason and thinks that it is impregnable. This is Satan's stronghold in the hearts of men; carnal reasoning, high thoughts exalting themselves against the knowledge of God. Paul speaks here of demolishing these fortresses of worldly reason. His war is against the world's system of thought which is continually seeking to exalt itself against the knowledge of God.

**Apologetics is primarily a battle over authorities.** The Apostle uses the term *reasonings* (λογισμούς) as a direct reference to his opponents' appeal to authority. Paul's opponents sought to discredit his apostolic authority and establish their own, but their authority was simply their own reasoning, opinions and ideas. Their authority did not go beyond themselves. All non-Christian world-views can be characterized by exalting human reasoning as ultimate and man as autonomous. That is the world's empty notion of authority. Paul's strategy is to tear down and destroy their arguments by bringing them into submission to the totalitarian claims of Jesus Christ and his Word. He would back them up to their own faith-commitments, and challenge them on what authority they based their arguments. As with Paul, every Christian has the confidence that God's inscripturated Word is absolute in authority and the ultimate standard of all truth and reality. It is certain because God is its author. God's infallible Word is forever settled in heaven (Ps. 119:89). The battle cry of the Christian is '*it is written*' (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

The fourth aspect of this battle concerns **prisoners of war**. Paul's siege demands that every thought be made captive to the obedience of Christ. The term '*bringing into captivity*' (αἰχμαλωτίζοντες) refers to prisoners of war. Paul does not just want to destroy his opponent's arguments; he is going to make them prisoners of war. Every thought is to be brought into submission to the totalitarian claims of Jesus Christ. Paul demands their allegiance to God's word. Their mind-set must be transformed and renewed. This implies regeneration which can only be accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul not only trusted in the power of God to demolish worldly reasoning, but also to convert his opponents. The goal of apologetics is always conversion and the advancement of the kingdom of God is its triumph.

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*Questions Answered* continued from page 2...

“instruct” or “instruction”. 1) This is not a question of adding something to Scripture, but rather the use of a necessary aid toward a comprehensive grasp of its doctrinal teaching. God made us rational, morally responsible beings, created in his image and likeness. We have been created with both the ability and necessity to organize. An orderly or systematic approach to Divine truth is a necessity, as seen in the necessary existence of doctrine and theology. Sadly, many who object to the use of a catechism turn rather to the very questionable use of other religious teaching materials which are either doctrinally shallow or unsound. 2) A catechism is an organized elementary approach to the truth of the Word of God. It is a primary introduction to the doctrinal teaching of Scripture. 3) There is a great need for all believers to have at least two types of knowledge concerning the truth of God: first, every young person should at least have a general acquaintance with Scripture. What many call “Bible Stories” gives the younger child a general knowledge of the Bible, its historical format, the basic principles of redemptive history and some knowledge about the various books of the Bible and their leading characters. Second, every young person should be taught to understand, think and reason doctrinally from the Scriptures. For centuries, this has been the purpose of a doctrinally-sound catechism. Catechizing ceased among our Baptist forefathers when they no longer emphasized their doctrinal distinctives and Confessions of Faith. In Sunday schools catechisms were replaced by “quarterlies,” which have proven, we believe, to be vastly inferior. 4) Baptists used catechisms extensively and with much spiritual profit until the past century. This objection itself demonstrates the sad departure of some Baptists from their own doctrinal distinctives and practice, and the ignorance of some modern Baptists concerning their own spiritual heritage.

**OBJECTION TWO:** Have not catechisms introduced error into the thinking of many? **ANSWER:** 1) This may be true, but the fault lies not in the use of a catechism per se, but in unscriptural presuppositions and religious traditions which have been superimposed upon the Word of God. 2) A catechism is true and useful only insofar as it accurately communicates the truth of Scripture. 3) Ideally, in at least some churches, catechizing is to culminate in a credible profession of faith. 4) A catechism should be a preservative of the truth and not an introduction into error. A given catechism is only as good, true or accurate as the doctrinal and theological presuppositions of its author[s]. As the very Word of God itself must be approached with consistent presuppositions, so must any religious literature, including a catechism.

**OBJECTION THREE:** There is a great danger in departing from biblical language both in wording and form. **ANSWER:** 1) There is always a danger in departing from Scripture in both doctrine and practice. This is true in any type of preaching or teaching. 2) The best preventive from such a departure has been the use of concise, comprehensive statements that accurately and consistently declare the truth of Scripture—Confessions and Catechisms—if they are doctrinally sound and accurately reflect the teaching of Scripture. 3) There is a need for concise and consistent doctrinal or theological propositions and summaries. The word “form” in 2 Tim. 1:13 refers to distinct outline or summary of Divine truth. A given theological proposition or statement is necessarily more concise than any given verse of Scripture because—if true or faithful to and consistent with the Word of God—it is based upon the analogy of faith [the total, self-consistent teaching of the Word of God as it bears upon any one given aspect of Divine truth], and not upon one or even several proof-texts.

**OBJECTION FOUR:** It is very dangerous to teach young, unconverted children to give scriptural or correct answers to doctrinal questions. **ANSWER:** 1) This objection is based on a great and legitimate concern for the souls of children who might become mere professing Christians by simply memorizing and mouthing the truth without an inward work of saving grace. 2) This objection might equally be brought against having young, unconverted children read or memorize Scripture, learn to pray or sit under a consistent, educational preaching ministry. 3) Every legitimate avenue for the communication of Divine truth must be used for the conviction, conversion, edification and spiritual maturation of ourselves and our families. This includes every means of grace, both public and private—personal and family Bible reading and prayer, corporate worship, the public ministry of the Word, sanctified fellowship with the people of God and the reading of sound religious literature. 4) The primary instrument after the Scriptures should be the use of a sound catechism. This is in keeping with the principles of instruction Divinely commanded in Scripture. A catechism is meant to supplement and enforce, not replace, the primacy of the Word of God.

**OBJECTION FIVE:** The use of a catechism promotes the very dangerous practice of developing a “proof-text” mentality i.e., the danger of basing a doctrinal system on a comparatively few selected passages of Scripture, a method used by various cults and others which often produces both a misunderstanding and a misinterpretation of Scripture. **ANSWER:** 1) This objection is based in part upon the fallacy that the Word of God must declare a given doctrine repeatedly for it to be true. Once is sufficient, although no biblical truth stands in only one isolated text. The necessity for the repetition of any given aspect of Divine truth to establish its validity reveals a very defective view of both God and Scripture. Every statement of Scripture is both true and truth. 2) The truth of Scripture exists as a comprehensive, consistent, unified whole. While the catechism may only give a statement or two to verify the doctrinal teaching of Scripture—if these statements are clear and consistent with the “analogy of faith”—they form a scriptural basis for one’s faith. Very often in evangelistic testimony or in the rigorous exercise of evangelistic apologetics, a clear, sound statement from Scripture may be the only firm or possible foundation for discussion. 2) It is hardly possible that any catechism could or should exist without a given amount of explanation or the necessity for further study. The questions, answers and proof-texts of the catechism provide an introduction to the doctrinal teaching of Scripture, not the final and exhaustive word. The questions and answers necessarily arouse the curiosity of the young child or new convert and call for additional explanation and discussion.

