

Determine the Speaker

(by Bob Pulliam)

This may seem unnecessary, but it is really quite essential. The Bible is filled with words and actions that weren't pleasing to God. Their presence in the Bible does not condone them. They are there for various needs, whether rebuke, or explanation of other matters. It is important that we determine who the speaker is, and his standing, before we lean on his words.

Was He Divinely Inspired?

The three friends of Job had many things to say. Much of it was not truth, however. If you simply pick a verse out of the middle of one of their discourses, and print it with the scripture reference, you could claim the Bible taught something that wasn't true. But such is not the case. These three friends were rebuked by God at the end of the book of Job. They did not speak what was true regarding God.

King David's son, Absalom, told the people that David was not being just in deciding the people's cases (II Sam 15:3f). Should we conclude that David was an unjust king? Absalom said what he did to steal the throne from his father. It was not recorded for us to know how well David ruled. The Amalekite reported to David that he killed king Saul, whereas we had already read that Saul took his own life. Should we believe the report of the Amalekite? It was not included to explain the death of Saul. Such was already described (see II Sam 1:1ff and I Sam 31).

Judas Iscariot was an apostle of the Lord. Apostles were divinely inspired of God. Judas went out and hanged himself, so hanging is divinely approved of God. But was Judas divinely inspired in going out and hanging himself? The apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Judas hanged himself about fifty days *before that event...* The servant girls masters of Acts 16 brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates and charged them with teaching unlawful customs. Are we to believe that Paul taught unlawful customs? No, that was the charge they brought out of anger!

So, not everything in the Bible is intended for application to our lives. We must discern which is intended for us by contexts.

Was the Speaker Being Sarcastic?

Sarcasm is used several times in scripture. It is used by the heathen to poke fun, and by the prophet to rebuke. It ordinarily takes the form of saying what is expected by a hearer, but is said in such a way that it is not intended to be followed. When Ahab called for Micaiah, the prophet of God, Micaiah told him: "Go and prosper, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king!" (I Kgs 22:15) Did Micaiah mean this? Certainly not, for Ahab responded: "How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" (v16) Micaiah then proceeded to tell Ahab that Israel would not win the battle Ahab was intending. Micaiah had engaged in sarcasm. The soldiers bowed before Jesus and said "Hail, king of the Jews!" (Mt 27:29) Did they mean it? The text also tells us that they were mocking Jesus.

Under What Law Spoken?

Many people never stop to think about the law under which a statement was made. The Old and New Testaments are equal in their eyes. The Bible clearly tells us that the New Testament replaced the Old Testament, and that we are no longer under the old (Gal 3:24f; Heb 7:11f). That is why we do not offer burnt offerings to the Lord. It is also why there is no longer a separate priesthood, but instead all Christians are priests of God (I Pt 2:5; Rev 1:6).

This does not render the Old Testament of no use. From it we learn sure lessons of the faithfulness of God, and how He deals with man. Many accounts from the Old Testament force us to conclude that when God speaks He expects man to listen and obey. After quoting an Old Testament prophecy about Jesus, Paul wrote, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Rom 15:4) The Old Testament is never cited by the New for commands we must keep today. Its examples were not regarded as binding law, but illustrious of how we should view our place in the new covenant. Many times people dwell upon the ten commandments as necessary for salvation. We are not under the ten commandments today. Not only were they *not* given to all mankind (Dt 5:1-21 - to Israel only), but are no longer binding as a law (Gal 3:24f; Col 2:14). We are under the law of the Spirit (Rom 8:2), and that law has repeated nine of those ten commandments. The one that is not reinstated in the new law is the command to remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.

Conclusion...

Hopefully you can see now how important it is to take a good look at the speaker in Bible passage. What he has to say may be pertinent to you, and it may not. If it's what David did to please the Lord, it is not binding upon us today. It may offer lessons for being devoted to God, but it does not instruct us on the proper order in actually rendering that service. If it's an uninspired individual, it may be totally devoid of truth, and not intended for our obedience. Watch for the speaker every time you read your Bible.