

# A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM



A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots growing over stone ruins. The tree's trunk is massive and textured, with roots spreading out across the ground and over the stone structures. The background shows more stone ruins and lush green foliage. The scene is set in a natural, outdoor environment.

THE FRUIT OF  
THE RIGHTEOUS IS A  
TREE OF LIFE,  
AND HE WHO IS WISE  
WINS SOULS.

PROVERBS 11:30 NASB

**PRINCIPLES  
FOR  
BIBLICAL  
*EVANGELISM*  
FOUND IN  
JOHN 4, “THE  
WOMAN AT  
THE WELL.”**

TAKE

- TAKE THE INITIATIVE! JN. 4:6-9

OFFER

- OFFER GOD’S MERCY! JN. 4:10-14

IDENTIFY

- IDENTIFY SPIRITUAL NEEDS! JN. 4:9-10

CONFRONT

- CONFRONT SIN JN! 4:16-18

REJECT

- REJECT FALSE WORSHIP! JN. 4:19-24

REVEAL

- REVEAL CHRIST! JN. 4:25-26

1. THE *CHURCH* AND THE *WORLD*.
2. WHY THE *WORLD HATES*
3. A *RECENT* BATTLE
4. THE *CHURCH* AND *PSEUDO TOLERANCE*
5. *POSTMODERNISM* AND THE *CHURCH*
6. *INTOLERANT* TOLERANCE
7. THE *CHURCH* AND *OBJECTIVE* TRUTH
8. LOSING *OBJECTIVE TRUTH* IN THE CHURCH
9. THE *CHURCH* AND *RATIONAL* TRUTH

## THE *FINAL* STANDARD *OF TRUTH*

But there's a *second*, equally important, implication of our confidence in God's absolute truthfulness: Since His Word is **OBJECTIVELY TRUE** and **PERFECTLY RELIABLE** in **everything** it teaches, **SCRIPTURE SHOULD BE BOTH THE STARTING POINT AND THE FINAL TEST OF TRUTH IN ALL OUR THINKING.**

If Scripture is wholly true, then **ANYTHING THAT CONTRADICTS SCRIPTURE** is simply **FALSE**, even if it is a fundamental belief upon which the world's most popular ideologies are based.

**THAT SORT OF BLACK-AND-WHITE RATIONALITY IS ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY IS INTOLERABLE IN A GENERATION THAT DESPISES THE VERY IDEA OF ABSOLUTE TRUTH.**

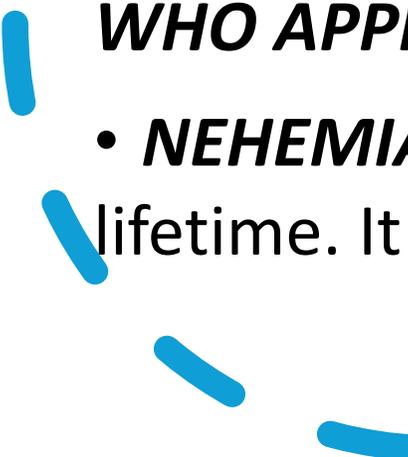
- Lest anyone misunderstand, we are not advocating **RATIONALISM**—the notion that human reason alone, apart from any supernatural revelation, can discover truth.
- A **RATIONALIST** imagines that **HUMAN REASON** is both the *source* and the *final test* of all truth. **IN EFFECT, RATIONALISTS EXALT HUMAN REASON ABOVE SCRIPTURE.**
- **AS CHRISTIANS WE OPPOSE RATIONALISM,** but Christianity is by no means hostile to **RATIONALITY**. We believe the truth is **LOGICAL**—it is **COHERENT**; it is **INTELLIGIBLE**.

**“NOT ONLY CAN TRUTH BE KNOWN RATIONALLY; IT CANNOT BE KNOWN AT ALL IF WE ABANDON RATIONALITY.”**



- **IRRATIONALITY** is an assault on the Scripture and the intent of God. When God gave the Bible, He meant for it to be **UNDERSTOOD**. But it can be understood only by those who apply their minds to it rationally. Contrary to what many assume, the meaning of Scripture is not something that comes to us through **MYSTICAL** means. It is not a **SPIRITUAL SECRET** that must be uncovered by some arcane or arbitrary method. **ITS TRUE MEANING MAY BE UNDERSTOOD ONLY BY THOSE WHO APPROACH IT RATIONALLY AND SENSIBLY.**

- **NEHEMIAH 8** describes the revival that took place in that man's lifetime. It was sparked by the public reading of the Scriptures:



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• ***“AND ALL THE PEOPLE GATHERED AS ONE MAN AT THE SQUARE WHICH WAS IN FRONT OF THE WATER GATE, AND THEY ASKED EZRA THE SCRIBE TO BRING THE BOOK OF THE LAW OF MOSES WHICH THE LORD HAD GIVEN TO ISRAEL. 2, THEN EZRA THE PRIEST BROUGHT THE LAW BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY OF MEN, WOMEN AND ALL WHO COULD LISTEN WITH UNDERSTANDING, ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE SEVENTH MONTH. 3, HE READ FROM IT BEFORE THE SQUARE WHICH WAS IN FRONT OF THE WATER GATE FROM EARLY MORNING UNTIL MIDDAY, IN THE PRESENCE OF MEN AND WOMEN, THOSE WHO COULD UNDERSTAND; AND ALL THE PEOPLE WERE ATTENTIVE TO THE BOOK OF THE LAW.” (NEH. 8:1-3)***

- Notice the stress on the people's attentiveness. The reading was for the benefit of ***"ALL WHO COULD LISTEN WITH UNDERSTANDING . . . . THOSE WHO COULD UNDERSTAND."*** Verse 8 describes how **EZRA** and the scribes did the reading: ***"TRANSLATING TO GIVE THE SENSE SO THAT THEY UNDERSTOOD THE READING."*** The reading wasn't a ritual exercise, like a chant or the ceremonial intoning of some liturgy. It was aimed at the people's cognitive faculties—***THEIR RATIONAL MINDS.***
- The power of the Word of God lies in its **MEANING**, not merely in the sound of the words. It is not a magical incantation, where its power might be unleashed through merely reciting syllables. ***THE POWER INHERENT IN SCRIPTURE IS THE POWER OF TRUTH.*** I like to say that ***THE MEANING OF THE SCRIPTURE IS THE SCRIPTURE.*** If you don't have the interpretation of the passage **RIGHT**, then you don't have the Word of God, ***BECAUSE ONLY THE TRUE MEANING IS THE WORD OF GOD.***

- It's not as if we can make the words mean anything we want them to mean, so that whatever significance we impose on the words **BECOMES** the Word of God. **ONLY THE TRUE INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT IS THE AUTHENTIC WORD OF GOD**, and any other interpretation is simply **NOT** what God is saying. Remember, **GOD'S WORD IS OBJECTIVE TRUTH REVEALED**, and therefore it has a rational meaning. That meaning, and that meaning alone, is the truth. **GETTING IT RIGHT IS OF SUPREME IMPORTANCE.**
- That is why it is so critical that we interpret Scripture carefully in order to understand it correctly. **IT IS A RATIONAL PROCESS, NOT A MYSTICAL OR WHIMSICAL ONE.**
- **IS IT A SPIRITUAL PROCESS?** Absolutely. I never approach my study of the Word of God without praying, **"LORD, OPEN MY UNDERSTANDING TO SEE THE TRUTH."** But I don't then sit there until something falls out of the sky; I open my books and pursue a **RATIONAL UNDERSTANDING** of the text.

- ***IT STARTS WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT SCRIPTURE IS INTERNALLY SELF-CONSISTENT.*** Therefore, as we compare Scripture with Scripture, the clear parts explain the more difficult parts. The more we study, the more light is shed on our understanding. ***IT IS HARD MENTAL WORK, BUT IT IS SPIRITUAL WORK NONETHELESS.***
- In fact, we are utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit to teach us truth, because ***“A NATURAL MAN DOES NOT ACCEPT THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD, FOR THEY ARE FOOLISHNESS TO HIM; AND HE CANNOT UNDERSTAND THEM, BECAUSE THEY ARE SPIRITUALLY APPRAISED.”*** (1 COR. 2:14). But the way the Holy Spirit gives us understanding is through our minds—employing our rational faculties (V. 16; EPH. 1:18; 4:23; 1 TIM. 1:7).

- **NEO-ORTHODOX THEOLOGY**, which rose to prominence in the first half of the twentieth century, has caused a tremendous amount of confusion about the **rationality** of truth. **NEO-ORTHODOX THEOLOGIANS INSIST THAT CHRISTIANITY IS AN IRRATIONAL BELIEF SYSTEM—A RELIGION OF “PARADOX.”**
- What they really are suggesting is that Christianity is **FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS**. **PARADOX** is a misnomer in the sense that they use it. A true paradox is a play on words, such as **“MANY WHO ARE FIRST WILL BE LAST, AND THE LAST, FIRST”** (MATT. 19:30), and **“WHOEVER WISHES TO BECOME GREAT AMONG YOU SHALL BE YOUR SERVANT”** (MATT. 20:26). But when the neo-orthodox use the term **PARADOX**, they are speaking of a real **CONTRADICTION**. **THEY REGARD ALL TRUTH AS IRRATIONAL, SELF-CONTRADICTORY, AND ABSURD TO THE LOGICAL MIND.**

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- **FAITH** in their system entails the abandonment of logic. It is a blind leap into the abyss of **IRRATIONALISM**. They borrowed their *irrationalism* from existential philosophy and made it the hallmark of their theology. In doing so, they laid the groundwork for a postmodern version of Christianity. But it is **NOT TRUE CHRISTIANITY**, because it has abandoned the rationality that is essential to truth itself.
  - The problem with such *irrationalism* is that it *nullifies* the law of non-contradiction, the essential ground of all rational thinking. If two contradictory propositions can both be true simultaneously, then an idea that opposes the truth cannot necessarily be deemed error.

- The **ANTITHESIS** of a true statement cannot automatically be judged false. That is the very same kind of thinking that lies at the heart of postmodernist tolerance. **IT IS NOT A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF TRUTH. IT IS IRRATIONALISM.**
- The apostle **PAUL** wrote, **“IF ANYONE ADVOCATES A DIFFERENT DOCTRINE AND DOES NOT AGREE WITH SOUND WORDS, THOSE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND WITH THE DOCTRINE CONFORMING TO GODLINESS, HE IS CONCEITED AND UNDERSTANDS NOTHING”** (1 TIM. 6:3–4).
- **Paul’s** statement assumes that **THE TRUTH IS RATIONAL** and **WHATEVER CONTRADICTS THE TRUTH IS ERROR**. That is the proper Christian understanding of biblical truth. **IT IS THE ANTITHESIS OF POSTMODERN THINKING.**

- **THERE ARE SOME DIFFICULT TENSIONS IN CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.** For example, we believe God is **SOVEREIGN** over the human will **“THE KING’S HEART IS LIKE CHANNELS OF WATER IN THE HAND OF THE LORD; HE TURNS IT WHEREVER HE WISHES,”** (PROV. 21:1). Yet we also believe people choose freely in accord with their desires so that each one of us is morally responsible for our actions **“SO THEN EACH ONE OF US WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF TO GOD,”** (ROM. 14:12). Many find those truths difficult to reconcile; yet there is no actual contradiction between them. **GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY IS NOT AT ODDS WITH HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY.** The two principles work in perfect harmony, even though it is not immediately obvious to us **HOW** they work. **SUCH TRUTHS ARE NOT CONTRADICTIONS;** they are not even paradoxes in the sense that neo-orthodoxy uses the term. They are difficult truths that, if anything, require us to exercise extra care in applying logical rigor. But we are not to think of them as irrational. **THEY ARE NOT.**