

Baggage

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Jesus said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:31b-32). Later, Paul wrote concerning “those who believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:3); and he was critical of certain people who were “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). Evidently, Jesus and Paul knew that you can and should know the truth.

Today, if you talk very much about knowing the truth, you will certainly encounter opposition! Some, like Pilate of old, scoff at the very idea that truth exists or can be known (John 18:38). Even within the church, influential voices are claiming that we cannot know the truth because each person brings his/her own suppositions to the Bible. We used to call them “pre-conceived ideas,” but the popular term nowadays is “baggage.”

Practically everyone realizes that we do, indeed, bring baggage to our study of the Scriptures. Our parents, education, religious background, and other life experiences color the way we look at things, including the Bible. The real question is, “can we overcome our baggage so that we actually learn and know the truth?” According to Jesus and Paul, people did so in the first century AD. If they could, why can’t we?

First-century folks carried baggage too. The Jews had traditions by the ton! Gentiles held all kinds of weird ideas about the gods, wisdom, philosophy, and morality. Both Jews and Gentiles had to put aside any and all of these things that conflicted with the truth as revealed in the Bible. Was it difficult? Undoubtedly! Did they ever

fail? Yes, sometimes they failed miserably! But at other times they succeeded admirably. They set aside their baggage and embraced the truth.

We must be honest enough to realize that our background influences the way we see the Bible. Then, like the early Christians, we must be humble enough to step back and look objectively to see if we have allowed our baggage to distort the truth. If we have, we must repent. But if not, then we need not apologize for boldly upholding the truth.



Bring the Candles!

Abraham Davenport served as the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives. One day in 1789, the sky of Hartford darkened ominously, and some of the representatives, glancing out the windows, feared the end was at hand.

Suppressing the uproar for an immediate adjournment, Davenport rose and said: “The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, then there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought.”

The Day of Judgment will one day appear. When it does, what will our Lord find you doing?

Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.

Luke 12:37, 38

Sharpening our Axes

"If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success" (Ecclesiastes 10:10 NASU).

Solomon gives a great lesson in preparation here. A woodsman may be a powerful and energetic person. Yet he will exhaust his resources if he does not take the time to prepare himself for his task. There is an important lesson for us today.

Far too many have assumed the role of teacher without proper preparation. They have become like the men of Ephesus who are *"wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying of the matters about which they make confident assertions"* (1 Timothy 1:7). It is a dangerous thing for a man to teach others the eternal truths of God. This is why Paul warned Timothy to *"pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching"* (1 Timothy 4:16), and James said *"let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment"* (James 3:1).

What then should one do to "sharpen his axe"? First, he must himself be a faithful, trustworthy man (2 Timothy 2:2). This means that he will not take liberties with God's inspired word. He recognizes that it is perfect and complete, and he must not tamper with it (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Second, he must be willing to 'burn the midnight oil' in intense study. He has to be a *"workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15). How does he handle accurately the word of truth? He does it by study. He does it by meditating on the word *'day and night'* (Psalm 1:2).

If we want to be successful, we will prepare ourselves. Solomon concludes this verse by noting that *"wisdom has the advantage of giving success."* Let us not be lazy in the handling of God's word. It is too important that we get it right.

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