



ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

“In the Nick of Time”



Occasional Essays and Other Stuff for Christian Students Presented by the President of Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

“...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

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Shall We Reason Together?

Part Four: Ye Know Not the Scriptures

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This essay is by [Kevin T. Bauder](#), president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

Juan de Valdes Leal. *Jesus Disputing with the Elders*. (1686).

Within the final week of His ministry, Jesus announced Himself as the Messiah and took possession of the temple in Jerusalem. During the buildup of hostilities that led to the crucifixion, He was confronted by each faction of the Jewish leadership. The confrontation with the Sadducees (Matt. 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27) is especially instructive.

The Sadducees are known mainly for the beliefs that they rejected. They did not believe in a bodily resurrection. They did not believe in the existence of angels or spirits. They did not accept much of the Hebrew canon, recognizing only the books of Moses as authoritative.

Their confrontation with Jesus centered upon the doctrine of the resurrection. They posed a question about a woman who had, under the code for levirate marriage or *yibbum*, wed multiple husbands, only to be widowed repeatedly. They asked whose wife she would be in the resurrection.

Their question was not a request for information. Instead, the Sadducees were attempting a *reductio ad absurdum*, pointing to an intolerable consequence (namely, polyandry) of a bodily resurrection. This placed Jesus in a dilemma: either He could embrace the intolerable consequence, or else He could distance Himself from belief in a bodily resurrection.

Conceding nothing to the Sadducees, Jesus slipped between the horns of the dilemma in an amazing *coup fourré*. “Ye do err,” He said, “not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.” In other words, He accused the Sadducees of two areas of ignorance. He then articulated two answers, one to respond to each area of ignorance.

In reply to the Sadducees' ignorance of the power of God, Jesus stated that, “in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.” This was new revelation. Jesus did not base this teaching on anything from the Old Testament, but upon His personal knowledge of things supernatural. It implies not only a knowledge of resurrection, but also a knowledge of angels. Such a reply was not calculated to endear Him to the Sadducees.



The more interesting part of Jesus' response concerns the Sadducees' ignorance of Scripture. Here, Jesus appealed to the text of Exodus 3:6, in which God says to Moses, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Reasoning from this verse, Jesus affirmed, “He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.”

In order to underline the Sadducees' ignorance of the Scriptures, Jesus began by asking, “Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God...?” Of course they had read it, as He well knew. Jesus had quoted from the one part of the Scriptures that the Sadducees recognized.

Jesus' question was no more a request for information than the Sadducees' initial question had been. In their question, the Sadducees tried overtly to embarrass Jesus. In His question, Jesus reciprocated. He was publicly labeling the Sadducees as biblical ignoramuses. But exactly how were they ignorant of the Scriptures? What had they overlooked?

Jesus' argument hangs on the tense of the verb: “I *am* the God,” not “I *was* the God.” Interestingly, the verb does not even appear in the Hebrew text. It is an implied term that must be supplied by the reader.

Even so, Jesus did not merely quote the text. He went on to reason from it. He had to, because the text does not say, “There will really be a resurrection.” It says, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” That is not exactly a straightforward declaration of a future resurrection.

Yet Jesus insisted that it is clear enough. God is not the God of the dead, He asserted, but of the living. Therefore, a resurrection is absolutely necessary. To say otherwise is to err greatly.

Jesus' argument involves certain intermediate conclusions and premises. Some of these are never articulated in the text. The reader is expected to intuit the omitted premises. In more complete form, the argument appears to run something like this:

God is [right now] the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.
Therefore, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must be living, even though they have died.
To be living (even though one has died) is to be sure of a resurrection.
Therefore, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are sure of a resurrection.

In His presentation, Jesus left more than one step unstated. Clearly, however, He expected His hearers to perceive the soundness of the conclusion. Matthew and Mark evidently shared this expectation of their readers, for they both reproduce the argument in essentially the same form. Jesus and the Evangelists unquestionably wanted people to follow a chain of reasoning, and even to supply certain elements that were missing in the argument.

In His conflict with the Sadducees, Jesus required people to think beyond the plain statements of Scripture. He made them reason. He forced them to draw the correct inferences, even requiring them to intuit some of the intermediate steps in the argument.

More specifically, Jesus faulted the Sadducees because they had not already done this reasoning. He expressed incredulity (“Have you not read. . . ?”) that the Sadducees had not already drawn the correct conclusion. The Sadducees knew the text, but Jesus said that they did not know the Scriptures. How could that be? In what sense were they guilty of biblical ignorance?

Not in the sense that they could not have quoted the verse. Not in the sense that they would have denied the verse's authority. Rather, they were ignorant in the sense that they had not reasoned correctly from the verse. If they had grasped what the verse actually implied, they would never have questioned the resurrection of the dead. The correct inference should have carried all the weight of the Scriptures themselves.

That leads to an important observation. To be ignorant of the implications of Scripture is to be ignorant of Scripture itself. God expects us to draw the correct conclusions from the text. If we fail to do this, then we, like the Sadducees, are liable to “err, not knowing the scriptures.” Jesus says so.

The affirmations of Scripture are absolutely authoritative. Exactly because that is so, whatever conclusions are necessarily implied by those affirmations are also absolutely authoritative. For Jesus, the inferences were just as authoritative as the original statements of the Bible. They should have been for the Sadducees, too. And they should be for us. ❁



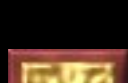
Frailtie.

George Herbert (1633)

Lord, in my silence how do I despise
What upon Trust
Is styled honour, riches, or *fair eyes*;
But is *fair dust*!
I surname them *gilded clay*,
Deare earth, fine grasse or hay;
In all, I think my foot doth ever tread
Upon their head.

But when I view abroad both Regiments;
The worlds, and thine:
Thine clad with simplenesse, and sad events;
The other fine,
Full of glorie and gay weeds,
Brave language, braver deeds:
That which was dust before, doth quickly rise,
And prick mine eyes.

O brook not this, lest if what even now
My foot did tread,
Affront those joyes, wherewith thou didst endow
And long since wed
My poore of love:
It may a Babel prove
Commodious to conquer heav'n and thee
Planted in me. ❁



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