

The Old and New Testaments as One Continuous Work

by Bill and Karen Bishop

The book of Acts says the Bereans were more noble than others because they checked Paul's teachings against the Scriptures for confirmation.

Acts 17:10-11

(10) And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

(11) These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

The New Testament had not yet been put together as a Scriptural text when Acts was written, so the term "Scriptures" in this passage has to refer merely to the Old Testament. Acts 22:3 tells us that Paul was "brought up ... at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers". He would know Torah like the back of his hand. As a student of Gamaliel, it is even believed that Paul would have had to memorize the entire Torah (first five books of the Bible). Why would Paul then teach things that would conflict with Torah, knowing that Believers would reject those teachings when they did their homework? His credibility would soon be bankrupt. Accordingly, this adamantly indicates that Paul's teachings would never contradict Torah. Paul has been greatly misunderstood by much of current Christendom because common theological views today ignore this factor of relativity. Paul was of Hebrew descent, and would never contradict Torah in his instruction.

Philippians 3:5

(5) Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

He also followed Torah, as did the Jews and the Temple priests.

Acts 25:8

(8) While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.

As we read Paul's epistles, we should follow the mandate found in Proverbs to put "line upon line" AND "precept upon precept" in order to unlock his true message. It is only to those who do so that God promises to "teach knowledge" and "make to understand doctrine":

Isaiah 28:9-13

(9) Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.

(10) For **precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:**

(11) For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.

(12) To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

(13) But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

Verse 13 indicates that our Father intentionally formed His Word in such a way that we would have to work with it properly in order not to "fall backward, and be broken and snared and taken". Many students of the Word today are diligent to put line upon line, here a little and there a little, and in so doing they formulate all kinds of belief "isms" which divide the body. Something is wrong there! Our beliefs should not be splintered.

Ephesians 4:4-6

(4) There is **one** body, and **one** Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

(5) **One** Lord, one faith, one baptism,

(6) **One** God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

If we consider Isaiah's formula, the reason should be readily apparent. The precept upon precept aspect of Isaiah's formula is being ignored. Putting line upon line MUST be in conjunction with putting precept upon precept. What are these precepts? They are the spiraling layers of theological thought that have their foundation in Torah instruction. When theological interpretations don't maintain the integrity of underlying Scriptural foundation, they always lead to errant doctrinal teaching. In the segment

called "*Introduction to Divine Patterning*" we used an analogy that is appropriate here as well:

When a home is constructed, the foundation is put in place first. Then the walls are built upon the foundation. The ceiling is put upon the walls, then the roof over the ceiling. The ceiling isn't hung in the air without an underlying structure. So it is with God's patterning. No valid doctrine can be formed without God's underlying structure, for anything formed without this structure ceases to be His Truth.

All foundational precepts are found in Torah. It was always those precepts that Paul built upon, and so we must take them into account when we try to interpret his epistles. It is Paul himself who laid this cornerstone for instruction in his letter to Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:15-17

(15) And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

(16) All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

(17) That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

He tells us in verse 15 that the Scriptures he accredited for reproof and doctrinal formation in verse 16 were the very Scriptures his audience had known as a child – Torah. Paul doesn't emphasize this and then ignore this same Torah foundation in his teaching! When we fail to align our interpretation of Paul's words with Torah, we fail to understand what he is really trying to say.

We need to remember that when Paul's words seem to conflict with Torah, we are not seeing the whole picture. Once we do, we will find that there is no conflict whatsoever. Even some of the wording in our English translations can create false illusions. For instance: when our Bibles quote Paul as saying "under the Law", he is often indicating "under the penalty of the Law". Therefore, such passages are commonly misconstrued.

To make matters worse from our western perspective, Paul is a master of juxtaposition and relates to his audience by almost exclusively using Hebraic circular logic. For that reason, seeing the whole picture isn't always easy for those schooled in our present linear culture. In our manner of thinking, an

interpretation is typically limited to the context of its immediate thought. In the Hebrew culture, a statement is interrelated to many thoughts from the surrounding text in order to compare, contrast, and draw a conclusion. That conclusion is often quite different than any single thought used to get there. That is why it is not possible to isolate mere phrases or verses within Paul's epistles and draw a valid conclusion based on the immediate thought. It is necessary to keep any thought within the entire context and consider all of the circular logic that draws us to Paul's ultimate conclusion. We cannot stretch out Paul's teachings in linear fashion, chop them up, extract what we want to hear, and expect to get his true intent. The heart of his message can only be found by following his complete thought flow and realizing that the end result of his teachings could only be – indeed must be – in total agreement with the Torah he knew, embraced, loved, and followed.

For instance, Paul does not pit God's Law against grace. He shows us how the Law alone is insufficient for salvation, but that it DOES have a place in the sanctification process to bring us to restoration with the Father.

Though the terms justification, sanctification, and salvation are often thought to be interchangeable, they are not. They do overlap, but they are not interchangeable. They have differing applications in Paul's writings, and when we try to treat them as synonyms, it prevents us from seeing the entire picture he is drawing. That will be discussed in greater detail in our upcoming series of articles called: "*Justification, Sanctification, and Salvation – What's the Difference?*".