



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

FEBRUARY 2015

The Constant Battle

The TV screen was filled with the red-faced spokesman for his cause drumming up followers who would agree that this was the defining issue of the times.

Of course, the very next story featured another upset victim of society, declaring that all who didn't march with her were unconcerned about justice. It seems that there is conflict everywhere. Sometimes we get confused as to where the battlefield is and what we are fighting over. There are issues of concern affecting almost every area of our lives. Physical war is taking the lives of thousands on several different fronts, devastating societies that have existed for centuries. Ideological battles are being fought in the media. Government agencies are stalemated because of partisanship. The religious world is fraught with battles over who is right and what that means. Social media has exacerbated the divide as blogs, posts, and tweets, hidden behind the wall of supposed anonymity, blurt out hateful opinions and accusations.

What started all the conflict? Is it possible to define the real issue? I am convinced we can not only know where the conflict started, but we can also know how it stops. Historically, it has been going on since the Garden of Eden. After the first pair of humans sinned against God, he promised that a bruising battle would take place between the children of Eve and the instigator of lies. It would culminate in the defeat of the Liar through the ultimate representative of Eve's children. The cosmic battle is between two "words" or two messages.

Before time, God created out of nothing a cosmos by expressing his word. That creation included man—both male and female—who would be his representatives and co-partners in developing the creation according to his design. His word is obviously stamped on his creation—so much

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so that any person on the earth can readily recognize that there is a creator who has both the authority and power to rule over it. (See Romans 1:18–32.) But there was a serpent in the garden representing another “word.” He appealed to Adam and Eve by suggesting that loyalty to God was not in their best interests and that they could have an even greater honor than that bestowed upon them by God. They doubted God’s word and acted upon the alternative. The battle was on.

Later God’s message was given further specificity in the words he gave to Moses for the nation of Israel. The truth, already in nature but obscured by the blindness of Adam’s descendants, was written down on tablets of stone for the purpose of establishing a people who could live in peace with the created world. It was a marvelous message! No human could have thought of such a system. If followed, these words would bring flourishing life to Israel, who could then pass it on to other people in the

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world. But there was a problem. Though the word was good and its promise was valid, the people couldn’t follow it. Their hearts were tainted by sin, guilt, shame, and fear. The word required a heart commitment

they couldn’t make. There is a long history of Israel’s interaction with other nations that shows how futile it is to ignore the word of God. After all, creation only works according to the design of the designer. But Israel couldn’t align either, even though they had the “word” in their possession.

Finally God’s word is fully stated in the coming of Jesus. Everything that was stamped on original creation and was specialized for Israel was fully revealed in the person of Jesus who is the final and full word of God. Before him the message was veiled in shadows and types. It was delivered in parts by prophecies and proclamations. But in him the full word was manifest. By looking through the lens of his person and works, we can see and appreciate the previous manifestations of God’s word. History makes sense.

Without that lens, history is complicated and the meaning of life is obscured. The events of history are simply reported, but not interpreted as fitting into a designed plan. Many with a scientific bent would doubt that there ever was a first man and woman. They would interpret the flood, if it happened at all, as natural phenomena in the long process of the earth’s formation. Abraham’s journey was just another migration story. The Exodus was another story of a natural rebellion-liberation movement. The conquest of Canaan was another takeover as nations rose and fell in the long scheme of history.

So it was that later Babylon defeated Israel; Persia defeated Babylon; Greece defeated Persia; and Rome defeated Greece. There is no self-evident meaning in these events—unless there is a word from God about how they fit into a grand scheme that will produce a child of Eve who will crush the head of Satan. The prophets of the Old Testament gave that word. For example, Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2) and then had a dream of his own (Daniel 7) that when interpreted revealed how all the above would produce a unique king who would appear at the time of Roman rule and establish a kingdom that would rule forever.

Of course to the unenlightened the crucifixion is just another imposter or victim of society being eliminated by those in power. Without the lens of special revelation regarding Jesus, history's meaning is up for grabs. Without the gospel lens, even contemporary events appear to present evil as the winner. Conspiracy theories abound as fear and uncertainty interpret what seems so obvious to the natural mind. Without the message of Jesus there is no hope.

However, there remains a battle going on among those who claim to embrace the special revelation in Jesus. As might be imagined, Satan is still fighting a bruising battle against the Word of God. He still tries to add a little or subtract a little or twist the meaning of the words to create "other gospels" that are not really good

news at all. The apostle Paul confronted two "other gospels" in his Epistles. In the letter to the Galatians, he addressed what I call a "shadow-oriented gospel." They were being told by some supposed authorities from Jerusalem that the gospel included some of the requirements listed under the Old Covenant, which actually were shadows pointing toward the final substance in Christ. Paul said that both this gospel and those who promoted it were accursed (Galatians 1:6–9).

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On another occasion Paul confronted some promoters of another "other gospel" in Corinth. These "super apostles" as he labeled them were promoting a message that catered to the demands of their culture. It is what I call a "shame-oriented gospel." Seeking the honor that the human soul craves since the shame-producing fall in the Garden, they were using the metrics of their culture to determine what they would offer as good news. Paul said they were proclaiming another Jesus, with another spirit (2 Corinthians 11:4). The culture valued celebrities, entertainment, oratorical skill, large crowds, and a lifestyle of comfort and control. In criticizing Paul they suggested that he was not in the same category as

they were. After all, he did not impress with his oratorical skills. He refused to craft his message in order to be entertaining. He usually had small groups that gathered to hear his teaching. And he led a life of tragedy: he was jailed several times; beaten five times by the Jews and three times by the Romans; shipwrecked, hungry, cold, isolated, shunned, and afflicted by a messenger of Satan. When he prayed to get relief from the affliction, God said, "No." "What kind of apostle is that?" they asserted.

We live in the glory that was taken from us in the Garden, because **we live in Jesus**.

Paul had so embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ that he was free from the shame that hopes to be covered by the honor of achievement. He was not looking for a glory that came from the public based on cultural values. He had entered the life of Christ, sharing in his glory. It was all-satisfying. He had no need to boast in his natural heritage, race, nation, or status. Neither did he boast of his achievements. Rather he brought attention to his weaknesses. He had discovered that the highest honor of all is giving honor to Jesus, so he was blessed in every opportunity of weakness to reveal the strength of the Lord of grace.

Though these "other" gospels battle for supremacy, the simple gospel of Jesus who

fulfilled all previous promises and prophecies, died in our shame, paid the debt of our guilt, and was raised in the power of the Spirit, will win out. It is consistent with the word that created the universe. It fulfills the word that was given to Moses. It gives substance to the shadows of the Old Testament. It climaxes the story of history. It alone answers the cry of the guilty shame-filled heart. It alone offers the glory that mankind was designed to enjoy. It alone continues to transform those who look into the face of Jesus. It must not be compromised by those clinging to shadows or those motivated by shame. The representative of Eve's children has crushed the head of the Liar. He is exposed. We live in the glory that was taken from us in the Garden, because we live in Jesus.

Yes, there are many causes that get our attention. There are many conflicts engaged. The one that underlies them all is the battle of the "words." The Word wins!



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