

Fifteenth New Testament Summary Jude and Ephesians

In discussing the distinction between antilegomena (being spoken against) and homolegomena (spoken as one or in unity), Middendorf states that no doctrine could be drawn from an antilegomena book. Thus a letter like Ephesians could establish doctrine because it was considered homolegomena, but not Jude. This discussion relates to how the canon [the word means "reed," used for measuring and establishing a standard] came about. The canon of the New Testament refers to the 27 books that the early church considered as coming from God. It is fascinating to note that the early church did not suddenly wake up one morning and say, "Hey, we need an official list of New Testament books!" Rather, the early church had to respond to false teachers who began making claims about which books were acceptable and which were not. The canon was an historical process led by the Lord to assure the world which books and letters were legitimate and trustworthy. There were three main criteria that the early church used to establish whether a book or letter qualified to be included in the New Testament: 1) The book or letter had to be consistent with the doctrine already established (esp. as derived from the Old Testament); 2) The book or letter had to have come from an apostle or a close associate of an apostle; and 3) The book or letter had to have been used in the earliest Christian worship services. The important thing is that Jude did indeed make the list! Thus, even though it is not used to establish doctrine, the Church treats it as the very Word of God and it is revered as such. Given that, I think there is something that should be deeply appreciated and I will now refer to what is possibly the single most bizarre thing recorded in the New Testament: "But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses..." (vs. 9) Why the dispute over the body of a dead believer/child of God? Answer: our bodies are precious and important to God. Not some of the time, but all of the time, even after we die. And what is important to God; what represents that which He esteems, the evil one strives for just the opposite response...he desires to dishonor it! This text should produce an important realization in us. In the very first chapter of Scripture, God declares that His creation is "very good." (Genesis 1:31) Did you know that this truth does not cease because sin entered into the world? Some would proffer that since sin entered the world and death through sin (Romans 5:12) that the creation is ruined, that we are no longer God's "very good" creation. Not true! Even though the creation groans (Romans 8:22) as result of its "bondage to decay" (Romans 8:21, the result of sin in the world), the creation is still precious to its Maker! This truth means that what we do to our bodies today and what will be done to our bodies when we die are not superfluous, random and inconsequential possibilities. They reflect gestures, decisions, symbols that either give glory to God or something else. How you mark your body, feed your body, dress your body, what you do with it when you die, etc. are all important concerns. I will not get into a laundry list of do's and don't's. That's not why I'm writing this. I am simply asking you to get to motives. Why do you do to your body what you do? Why do you plan to do this or that to your body when you die? The motives are to be checked and they are to give glory to God's creation. As 1st Corinthians 6 says, "You are not your own; you were bought at a price [Jesus' blood]. Therefore honor God with your body." (vs. 19b-20) [here St. Paul transitions into speaking of the body of Christ, the Church, but he intertwines the discussion with the fact that our actual bodies are meant for the Lord and not immorality in 1st Cor. 6] One of the keys to informing motives on this matter is to avoid

that which is destructive. Destruction is the essential goal of the evil one. Creating/making/forming/building/shaping go the opposite direction. These things are of God. The dispute over Moses' body was on. Michael wanted to honor God's creation; the devil wanted to desecrate it. Isn't it interesting that leading up to the dispute between Michael and the devil that Jude warns against the "godless" (vs. 4) who "pollute their own bodies"? (vs. 8)

Ephesians Part I: Ephesians is a remarkable letter, truly a gem. I don't think one can read it often enough. There is much that can be said here about this letter, but I want to zero-in on one theme in particular that forms part of the Christian life (sanctification) section of the letter. First, some background. Ephesus was a port city (the water was much closer to the city than it is today). That means it was a pluralistic environment; all kinds of worldviews, ideas, religions and lifestyles flooded this large and busy city. In the time of St. Paul, the city gave special tribute to the Greek god Artemis (Acts 19). This so-called "god," was a fertility god. It's many fertility nodules (while seeming gross or strange to the outside observer) served as representing the religious reliance upon her as a source of life (be it fertility for the land or life in general). To "inspire" such blessings, the Greeks posted temple prostitutes who were considered "priestesses." That is, take note of the correlation: false gods, false worship perpetuate false life and immorality. If there was ever a culture that would tempt a Christian to forsake following the Lord Jesus Christ, then the culture in Ephesus was it! With this background, we can begin to understand chapters 5 and 6. God writes through St. Paul to counter the sexual immorality and perversity by teaching about God's sacred institution of marriage. If the Ephesian Christians are to be faithful to God, they must be faithful in marriage (if they are married). In this chapter 5, God reveals the roles of marriage. It is vital to note that the book of Genesis provides the backdrop. The Genesis chapter 2, "helper" or "help-meet" is a "counter-part," a perfect and equal partner that completes (and in Genesis chapter 1 both male and female are in the image of God). St. Paul reinforces these truths on the cusp of writing on marriage at 5:21; we are to submit to each other out of reverence for Christ. All Christians, men and women, young and old are to live in submission towards one another; that is the way of the Christian: we serve each other! With that said, St. Paul goes into the roles of marriage. I'm not going to get long here. I want to simply bring out his analogy and comparison: The woman represents The Church; the man represents Christ. Because the woman especially emulates the Church in marriage, she focuses on submission; because the man especially emulates Christ in marriage, he focuses on sacrifice. There you have it! Which word seems more appealing to you or should I say to your sinful flesh? Would you like to submit or sacrifice? The ideas of submission and sacrifice are both undesirable, one inspires notions of slavery; the other notions of losing your life! The beauty of God's wisdom, however, is what happens when you put these together: the man sacrifices for his wife and she sees it in the way he treats her (he treats her as one who is "radiant...without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless," vs. 27). When she sees this, she willingly (key word) submits to him; she willingly desires to respect him and support his God-given leadership to emulate Christ for the sake of the marriage and family. When the man sees this submissive spirit, he is inspired to continue sacrificing for his wife. This is the cycle, these are the roles and these also protect a marriage from the sexual immorality of the culture.

Ephesians Part II: But the immorality if you recall flows from idolatry and false religion. That is, the real battle is a spiritual one. So what does St. Paul do? He equips the Ephesians

in chapter 6 by teaching them about the "full-armor of God." There are six pieces of armor that God gives you for spiritual protection, but notice that the Christian is commanded to actively "put on" this armor of God. You can't sit around in a lazy fashion. The Christian life is passive AND active. Passive in receiving God's healing and empowering gifts; active in living out the fruit and power of these gifts. Part of that activity is to "put on" the armor of God: #1 The belt of truth means that you stand by convictions to speak the truth. By doing so, you start to rob the devil of opportunities to accuse you about your words. You protect your conscience with this truth. There's an old saying, "If you always tell the truth, you never have to worry about forgetting what you said."; #2 The breastplate of righteousness does not refer to Christ's righteousness for us to save us, but the righteousness of good works flowing from a heart that chooses what is good over choosing what is evil. Again, by living this way, the devil has less ammunition for accusing us. We strengthen our consciences; #3 Feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace means that wherever your feet take you, you enter that place, that arena, that environment ready to shine God's light shone through the gospel. That is, you learn how to counter dark influences with the light of the gospel in your mind and on your lips; #4 You take up the shield of faith (the first offensive weapon mentioned; the ancient shield was also used as a weapon). This recognizes that along life's path, the devil fires missiles/flaming arrows accusing us, trying to take away our confidence that we are forgiven children of God, so what do we do? We lift up our shield of faith, but understand, faith itself holds to Jesus Christ and nothing else (otherwise, "faith" is not true faith). When Christ is therefore held up, then all arrows of accusation melt and are destroyed, because Christ took our every sin, failure and reason for shame and guilt upon Himself; #5 Take the helmet of salvation that causes you to realize that during this race and battle called "life," you will grow weary at times, so what do you do? Answer: look up to heaven, look up and know that you are saved, that you belong to God, that Jesus has prepared a place for you; remind yourself of your hope that is certain and true; this will protect your thoughts and your mind; #6 The sword of the Spirit. The text itself identifies this: it is the very Word of God. No matter what the evil one throws at you, you can respond with the Word of God and it is this Word that causes the evil one to depart from you. Finally, notice what these are "wrapped with" so to speak: prayer...pray constantly, this is your spiritual protection in a world that is confused and pluralistic like that ancient and idolatrous Ephesian culture.

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