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“IS THAT ALL THERE IS?”

Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller wrote a song thus titled, and Peggy Lee made a hit recording of it in 1969. Its lyrics somewhat reflected the cynicism and cultural breakdown our nation experienced beginning in the 1960s.

The question in the song’s title is appropriate in matters of religion. In discussing doctrinal and denominational division, a gentleman commented, “After you get past the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, it’s all a matter of interpretation.” The question is, “Is that all there is, really?”

If so, why so many books and pages in our New Testaments? Could not God have simply provided the accounts of Jesus’ miracles that produce faith (John 20:30–31) and then said: “Now this is all that matters: Believe that Jesus died for the sins of the world, was

buried, and on the third day arose. Interpret the rest of it any way you choose”?

Yes, Paul summarized the **facts** of the Gospel in these three bedrock events, which he had preached to the Corinthians and by which they were saved (1 Cor. 15:3–4). But does anyone believe that Paul literally meant “that is all there is” to the Gospel? Is all of the New Testament optional but these three facts, allowing “interpretation” freedoms that give credence even to direct contradictions of the inspired text? If all else is subject to variegated “interpretations,” who has the right to say that those “big 3” doctrines are not likewise? Actually, with little trouble, one might find modernist and/or postmodernist theologians who leave all three of them “up for grabs.”

Surely, the author of the sweeping generalization did not really mean what he said. Does he hold Paul’s declaration that the Bible is God’s inspired revelation to men (1 Cor. 2) as a “matter of interpretation”? What about his explicit command to the church to withdraw from the fornicating brother (ch. 5), or the instructions regarding marriage (ch. 7), idolatry (chs. 8, 10), worship (11–14)? One cannot ignore the fact that he taught them about baptism (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:13–15) and reminded them that baptism was the means by which they became members of the body, the church (12:13; Acts 2:37–47).

Manifestly, Paul used a figure of speech when he declared: “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). That was not a description of sole content, but the theme around which his entire message revolved and from which it drew its power. So with his summary of the Gospel facts in chapter 15. The remainder of the New Testament is **not** peripheral, optional, inconsequential, or beside the point. As the psalmist wrote: “The sum of thy words is truth” 119:160).

**5101 East University Drive, Greenbelt Business Park
(HWY 380/377, 3 mi. E of Loop 288), Denton, Texas 76208
For free Bible study by mail, call 940.387.1429 or 940.323.2120
or e-mail northpointcoc@hotmail.com
Visit our web site at northpointcoc.com.**