



Volume 7

News from the Blue Ridge

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Issue 2



Family Events:

Again I'm running very late in getting out the newsletter! Old age and a busy schedule just don't mix very well together, as I'm discovering with advancing age. Increasingly, as I anticipate a more relaxed pace of living, the reverse seems to be what happens.



January was mostly occupied with getting the spring semester underway and with finishing up a two month stretch of preaching Sundays and Wednesdays at Midway Baptist Church in Gaffney, SC. This was a most enjoyable two months of preaching again after not being able to since the explosion of health issues three years ago. The church was beautifully decorated during the holidays.

Tucked in the midst of this was a lot of watching after grandkids -- the most enjoyable of these extra activities! Clay and Taylor spent several nights with us during January while

Brian had tile jobs in other parts of either NC or SC, which meant that he couldn't get home in time to pick the kids up from school. So we had some extra time with the grandkids, "making memories" as Claire likes to call it.

Health issues once again are challenging me. Both the diabetes and the high blood pressure have flared up again in January and are causing some concern. Neither are at alarming levels but enough to necessitate trips to doctors to begin new medication to try to get them under control.



Academics:

With the beginning of the spring semester on Jan. 7 this time -- a week earlier than usual for some unknown reason -- I began a new adventure with students that is proving to be extremely enjoyable for me and -- I hope -- for them as well. Our religion department offers a senior level seminar undergraduate course in five disciplines: Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, Contemporary Theology, and Religious Education. The content of each seminar varies according to the interest and expertise of the professor teaching it. I'm teaching the New Testament seminar this spring. Because of a long standing interest in exegetical methodology -- and after having taught both a Ph.D. year long seminar and a semester long M.A. seminar in modern critical methodology at SWBTS for years -- I decided to explore the history of the interpretation of the New Testament with the students. The scope of the study was expanded to include the pre-modern eras of interpretive history, which I had not explored with the same level of detail previously.

The course is organized around two central questions: (1) What is it that we're interpreting? and (2) How have people gone about interpreting it? During the first unit of study, "Understanding Texts," we covered over five weeks the nature of scripture beginning with the human angle -- both the historical and literary nature of written materials; then moved on to the divine angle -- concepts of revelation and inspiration. Then we finished up with a consideration of how various Christian groups have wrestled with establishing authoritative norms of interpretive understanding of the Bible down through the centuries. Perhaps one of the most exciting sessions was in dealing with Baptist tradition at this point and how Baptist confessions of faith have worked down through the past several centuries of our history.

Unit 2 began the formal study of the history of New Testament interpretation. The class format switched from a combination of class lecture and discussion to a combination of lectures on Tuesdays and formal paper presentations by students on Thursdays. Each week a single period of interpretative history is covered. The Tuesday class period attempts to paint the broad picture of trends, key influential individuals etc. for that period. Then one or two students present detailed studies on a smaller segment of that era on Thursdays.

The course is working me hard. I made to the commitment to prepare and post a Lecture Notes page for each topic in the course. These files range from between twenty and eighty pages per topic. By the end of the semester I will have generated a textbook on this subject that is close to fifteen hundred pages in length. If you're interested in taking a look at all these materials, including the students' papers so far, go to [Religion 492](#) in the [Academic section](#) of [Cranfordville.com](#). It's all there!



Claires' Musings:

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Lately most of my time at school has been spent working on a large library book order. It's been exciting because this was my first time to order such a large amount of books. But, at the same time it's been difficult because, with no help in the library, there is very little time to work during the day on extra things such as this. That meant a lot of work in the evenings. It was worth it. I had to work on learning more about what our school library actually had and then what we needed. I worked on what needed to be done long before this, but never had enough time to do that. I learned a lot about our library and that was a good thing. There is still a long way to go, of course, but I still feel good about what I was able to accomplish. I had such a long wish list of books left over that I'm ready for the next opportunity to order. Another good thing about all of this is that it will be a great help for my "Collection Development" class that I am taking now. It would have been more helpful if I could have had this class first, so I would have known more what to do. I have a tendency to learn more through my mistakes, so maybe this will be best after all.

Last week (the last week in January) was my "bus duty" week at school. My duty was in the auditorium with the students who come before school starts and the kids waiting on the buses after school. The duties are usually about 40 minutes each time, morning and afternoon. When that time adds up for the week, it seems almost like an extra day added on to

the regular time. Well, did I ever get lucky!! An ice storm hit our area and our district missed four days of school. I had worked a very long day the Saturday before on the book order and was especially glad that I did before the storm hit. Another nearby district was closed for the entire week. Missing Monday enabled me to get my homework in on time for my master's class. Thursday was a teacher workday, which helped tremendously. So I only had one day of bus duty for the week. Fantastic!! Tuesday and Wednesday gave me extra time to get more work for my class. Of course, we will have to make up this time later.

I'm glad that Angie and Carrie and I are emailing each other. Email is wonderful! I do get behind, though, and need to catch up. The girls seem to be happy. Angie has had more than enough snow in Washington. She said she's never seen so much snow, which is understandable coming from Texas.



Lorin's Musings:

For three sessions we have considered the issue of paraenesis, or moral exhortation, as found in the New Testament and the letters of the NT especially. We have looked at the nature of moral exhortation in the ancient world, a social study of where and how it surfaced in the ancient world, and a study of how behavior links up with spirituality in the teachings of the New Testament. With this fourth study, we begin an exploration of the patterns of moral exhortation as they show up in the New Testament.

Many times moral admonitions surface in the pages of the NT in a very generalized manner, sometimes randomly inserted by the NT writer into his document. Sometimes this is how Paul utilized parenthesis. Usually, these instances have some conceptual link to a similar principle found somewhere in the Old Testament.

For example, Jesus' sermon on the mount in Matthew's version concludes the first major body division in 5:48 with the admonition: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (NRSV). In Greek it is, "Ἐσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐρανιός τέλειός ἐστιν. In the series of six admonitions that precede (5:21-47), Jesus demanded a pattern of relationships with others both in attitudes and actions that stemmed from deep down inside the individual, and that stood in contrast to how the OT was typically interpreted by many in his day. This climatic demand in verse forty eight summarizes the essence of all six issues and sets the standard of measurement for behavior as that exhibited by God

himself. This demand is based on the introductory declaration to the Ten Commandments in Lev. 19:2. Leviticus 19:2a says, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (NRSV). In the LXX it reads, ἄγιοι ἔσεσθε ὅτι ἐγὼ ἀγιος κύριος ὁ θεός ὑμῶν. This oft repeated demand in the OT is closely connected to the emphasis in Deut. 18:13, "You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God" (NRSV; LXX τέλειος ἐστι ἐναντίον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου.) The Greek word τέλειος translated as 'perfect' means 'wholeness' and 'completeness.' Thus Jesus built his demand for behavior off the OT emphasis on holiness and wholeness, with God as the defining standard of what that means. This stands in stark contrast to the declaration about the inadequacy of the self-achieved righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in 5:20, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (NRSV).

In letters of the NT, some contain almost nothing but generalized admonition inserted pretty much at random. The Letter of James, for example, is made up pretty much of nothing but generalized admonitions. No clear cut organizing pattern in the way these are presented can be detected, apart from coming in small chunks of connected admonition. This is one of the reasons modern western Bible interpreters have a hard time with James. A quick check of just a few commentaries will reveal drastically different outlines of the contents of this NT document.

With next month's study, we will begin exploring distinctive types of moral admonition that had counterparts in the surrounding Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures.