

E. W. Bullinger, A Biography

Juanita S. Carey, Kregel Publications (2000)

Notes by Bob Evely. Numbers in (parentheses) denote page number from the book.

This is an excellent biography of a man who, while greatly respected as a teacher and preacher of God's Word, was also criticized greatly as he dared to espouse opinions contrary to the mainstream Church. Mr. Bullinger was clearly not concerned with pleasing men, being popular, or maintaining the status quo. His one concern was being a faithful teacher of God's Word, and he dedicated his life to a microscopic study of the Bible to discern what God has revealed.

While Mr. Bullinger never came to the conclusion that God will ultimately save all, I believe he would have had his life been spared for a few years longer. He did have conversations with Mr. Knoch (see page 154), and like Mr. Knoch he saw the problems with Bible translations and popular Church teachings, and the need to examine each word carefully and consistently.

Being faithful

"Popularity is not to be our aim; success is not to be our object; results are not to be our guide; we are called to be faithful in our testimony." (26)

Must study the Bible for ones-self

During his ministry, Bullinger was often heard to advise his audience not to believe anything simply because he said it, but to search the Bible for themselves. (41)

The Bible is the Word of God

A friend wrote about Bullinger's great knowledge of the Bible ... "To him it was the Word of God, the revelation to men of the mind and Will of God; he was a convinced upholder of its inspiration and a stout defender of its verbal accuracy, apart from defective translation weaknesses." (58)

A love for the Bible, not Bible societies

In the midst of a dispute with the British and Foreign Bible Society, Bullinger said:

"I love the Bible better than a Bible Society." (78)

On the importance given to Baptism and The Lord's Supper by the Church

"If we were asked to name the subjects which are put forward to-day with the greatest frequency and urgency, we should say, they are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. But note the place which these occupy, and the position given to them in the Epistles, which were written specifically for the instruction of the Church. Baptism is mentioned only 19 times in 7 Epistles (the noun 5 and the verb 14), and it is not once named in 14 out of the 21 Epistles; and as for the Lord's Supper there are not more than three or four

references to it in the whole of the New Testament. In 20 (out of 21) of the Epistles it is never once alluded to! From the prominence given to it by man, one would imagine the New Testament to be filled with it.” (96)

On religious traditions

Despite his religious background and education, he never allowed himself to be limited by ingrained habits of religious tradition. The testimony of the Bible was most important to him. Time and time again he endeavored to bring people back to the Bible even if this defied their religious traditions.

“Tradition is like the tether which prevents an animal from getting a blade of grass beyond the length of that tether.” (96)

“It was the one great question which underlay all others at the Reformation. For, what was the Reformation in its essence? Was it not just the abandonment of human authority for Divine authority? Was it not all contained in this – the giving up of the authority of the Church for the authority of the Word of God?” (97)

“We must refuse to acknowledge an infallible Pope: we cannot believe in an infallible Church or discern its so-called ‘voice’: we look in vain for infallibility in poor, fallen, human reason, or in the darkened understanding of mortal man, which needs to be illuminated with Divine Light. We must therefore hold fast the faithful Word, or we have nothing, absolutely nothing, to trust to. We must hold fast by the infallibility of the inspired Word, and ever maintain that ‘The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the Religion of Protestants.’” (98)

On the need to distinguish between “the Kingdom” and “the Church” in Scripture

“Now this is the duty which we have to perform with regard to these two – ‘the Kingdom,’ and ‘the Church.’ Nowhere are they said to be the same; nowhere are the terms used synonymously: God has separated them...” (109)

On the means used by God to provide for needs

“When we have need of any supply and we trust in the Lord, He supplies our need by His own means; means which He employs, and which become ours when used by us. If He supplies our own financial need, He does not give us the money miraculously, so that we put our hand in our pocket and find it there; but He employs means of showing us, in His own perfect way, and of guiding us (Psalm 32:8), what we are to do; or showing to a friend or even a stranger how he or she is to be His means in supplying that need.” (119)

On church membership

“Never be in any Body where you may be ‘turned out’; or have your name down where it may be scratched out. Be content with the membership which God has given you in the spiritual unity of the Body of Christ, from which no power in Earth or Hell can cut you off.” (120)

On prayer

“Just as the natural breath is the sign and evidence of physical life – so prayer is the mark and sign of the possession of spiritual life. The analogy is complete. Natural life commences with breathing and the breathing produces a cry. It is so with the New Birth ... From that moment the breathing continues as the spontaneous outcome of the New Life. We require no more rule for the one breathing than the other. No knowledge of Physiology is required for the one, and no knowledge of Theology is necessary for the other. Indeed one has often listened to discourses on Physiology till one has exclaimed, ‘Pray say no more or I shall be afraid to breathe!’ So it is with the breathing of the new nature. The moment it becomes the subject of discourse or of rule – its essence is gone. We are such formulists by nature that we need nothing to encourage formalism in our prayers ... But true prayer is spontaneous. Our business in natural life is to breathe and not to think about it. The moment we begin to think about our prayer we are occupied with the means and lose the end.” (121)

On spiritism, and death

“The spirits pretend to be what they are not. This has been confessed even by the spirits themselves. It is merely a pretence, emanating from the prince of demons himself in order to deceive mankind and afford the semblance of proof of the Devil’s lie, ‘There is no death.’” (126)

On the need for endorsements from men

“You ask ‘whether any important Theologian or writer endorses or agrees with *Things To Come*.’ We really cannot tell you, as it does not matter in the least whether they do or not. The all important question is – Does *Things to Come* agree with the Word of God, for there and there only ‘important writers’ ‘spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.’” (129)

On a deeper study of God’s Word

Bullinger’s research method was microscopic in its thoroughness. Again and again, he would isolate a subject, develop it, and present it for inspection, study, and admiration.

“‘All things necessary to life and godliness’ lie upon its surface for the humblest saint; but, beneath that surface are ‘great spoils’ which are found only by those who seek after them as for ‘hid treasure.’” (134)

God’s spokesmen are never popular

“God’s prophets were men who could never swim with the stream, they were never popular, they could never make popularity their aim, they could never look on success as their end. And it is the same to-day with God’s spokesmen and witnesses ... If any of you do not believe it, try it! Be a faithful witness for God; dare to stand alone with Him, and you will soon see that you will have to ‘suffer persecution.’” (146)

On the fallibility of the “early church”

“We are told, on every hand, to-day, that we must go back to the first three centuries to find the purity of faith and worship of the primitive church! But it is clear from this comparison of Acts 19:10 and 2 Timothy 1:15, that we cannot go back to the first century. No, not even to the apostle’s own life-time! This turning away could not have been merely personnel; but must have included his teaching also ... It was Pauline truth and teaching from which all had ‘turned away.’ ... The four Gospels and the Sermon on the Mount are taken as the essence of Christianity, instead of the Epistles specially addressed to Churches.” (148)

On Pentecostalism

“Pentecost thus is shown to have nothing whatever to do with the Church; and all the modern talk about ‘pentecostal blessings’ and ‘pentecostal enduement,’ etc., and the awful heresy of the ‘Pentecostal league’ are all based on a scripture which does not refer to the Church of God at all; and those who so base it are those who so greatly neglect the teaching of the Holy Ghost in the Pauline Epistles, which are expressly given for the guidance, teaching, blessing, and building up of the Church. All that Christians need of teaching concerning the work and power of the Holy Spirit is fully contained and revealed in the Epistles, which are written for that purpose.” (150)

Traditions of men versus the Word of God

To Bullinger’s mind, it was the reliance on tradition instead of on the study of the Bible that prevented people from understanding and enjoying it.

“The cloud that now rests over its intelligent study arises from the fact that it is with us to-day as with the Jews of old – ‘The Word of God has been made of none effect by the traditions of men’ (Matthew 15:1-9).” (159)

“But our object is to ‘Open the book’; to let it speak; to hear its voice; to study it from within itself ... The method of the ‘Higher’ criticism is to discredit a Book, or a passage on internal evidence. Our method is to establish and accredit Holy Scripture on internal evidence also, and thus to derive and provide, from its own pharmacopoeia, an antidote to that subtle and malignant poison. This method of study will reveal more convincing and ‘infallible proof’ of inspiration than can be adduced from all the reasonings and arguments of men.” (159)

Important points when studying the Bible

“... an interpretation of a passage to be satisfactory: --

- (1) Must take all the words in their natural meaning and Scriptural usage
- (2) Must be uniform and consistent in its translation
- (3) Must give due weight to the inexorable laws of grammatical construction
- (4) Must give the passage its logical place in the context
- (5) Must harmonize the passage with the general teaching of the whole book, and not merely cleverly explain it as though it were an isolated passage.

Distinguishing between Paul's early and later letters

Mr. Bullinger became convinced of the importance of distinguishing between Paul's early letters from his later letters, believing that the "dispensational boundary" was to be drawn at Acts 28; that being the birth of the Church. (181)

Epistles before Acts 28

Galatians
1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
Hebrews
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians
Romans

Epistles after Acts 28

Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
Philemon
1 Timothy
Titus
2 Timothy

On signs and wonders in the present age

"We have come into a new Dispensation, where the old things have passed away; where all things are become new; where all things are of God. That which is perfect has come. 'Signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and spiritual gifts' have here no place. The gift of prophecy has failed, as foretold in 1 Corinthians 13:8. The gift of tongues has ceased. Knowledge (gnosis) of the mysteries has no place (1 Corinthians 13:8; cp. verse 2 and 14:2). That which was partial and incomplete has been done away. All these things had their appointed place and service in that Dispensation to which they belonged. They were to be sought and used and controlled; but we are now in a Dispensation where all is perfect. The word 'perfect' means that we have come to the end, or the last Dispensation." (194)

Satan's influence in the church ... calling God into question

"The history of Genesis 3 is intended to teach us the fact that Satan's sphere of activities is in the religious sphere, and not the spheres of crime or immortality; that his battlefield is not the sins arising from human depravity, but the unbelief of the human heart. We are not to look for Satan's activities to-day in the newspaper press, or the police courts; but in the pulpit, and in professors' chairs. Wherever the Word of God is called into question, there we see the trail of 'that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan.'" (195)

On legalism in the church

"The subjugation of the conscience, and the extinction of liberty ... are, and ever have been, the two aims and objects of religious persecution. The spirit of them is seen in the religious intolerance of modern Christian and so-called Protestant sects, who suffer not their members to worship outside their own bodies, without making them feel certain pains and penalties, often resulting in excommunication, and extending as far as surveillance of the private life and associations which bring 'a visit' from those who assume and usurp an authority in defiance of the simplest laws of Christian liberty. Even those outside, like

ourselves, are made to feel the secret power of religious boycotting which is as rife and rampant in some 'Christian' sects as in the political sphere. Let a member of such sects dare to learn and discover some new truth from the Word of God, which happens to be different from what has been determined on by the sects themselves, and at once he is made to experience the worst features of 'religion'" ... (196)

"It (religion) has its Eleventh Commandment: 'thou shalt not differ in opinion.'" (197)

On "religion"

"I never write religious books. Religion may mean anything. What you and I want is not religion, but Christianity. CHRIST." (204)

On the need for independence

"Very few care to be thought peculiar, and therefore they like to have some names to appeal to. But this is the very reason why the mists of tradition have been allowed to take the place of independent research."

This reliance on independent research rather than religious orthodoxy remains for many the hallmark of Bullinger's work. (232)

The sufficiency of Scripture

Others have observed that "Bullinger's life was devoted to the detailed analysis of the Scriptures, rooted in his foundational beliefs that they are truly the written word of God, that they are entirely sufficient unto themselves, and that as such they must be allowed to interpret themselves." (233)

"We claim only one thing – an earnest desire to believe God; and to receive what He has said, regardless alike of the praise of man or the fear of man; and quite apart from all traditional beliefs or interpretations." (234)

References

"E. W. Bullinger, A Biography," by Juanita S. Carey
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Many other of Mr. Bullinger's writings have been published by and are available from Kregel Publications, including:

"The Companion Bible"
Kregel Publications
Grand Rapids, MI 49501