

The Ministry of the Standard Lesson Commentary

Paper for the **Stone Campbell Journal Conference**, Milligan University, TN, 4.12.2024

Mark S. Krause, Ph.D., Wildewood Christian Church

Presented with Dr. Ron Nickelson, David C. Cook Publishers

My Participation

In 2002, after I began serving as Academic Dean at Puget Sound Christian College, I received a note from my old classmate and friend, Ron Nickelson. We had gone through the Ph.D. program together at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, the first Stone-Campbell people to complete the degree.

Ron had begun to work for Standard Publishing in Cincinnati as an editor for the Standard Lesson Commentary. He wanted to know if I would be interested in writing some lessons for this publication. Having grown up in First Christian Church, I was well aware of this resource. My mother had taught the Women's Bible School class at my church for 20+ years until her death and used the SLC every week. She faithfully did the suggested devotional reading each week. On Saturday night, we were not to disturb her as she poured over the "teacher's edition" of the SLC, preparing for Sunday morning. She was a good teacher (she had earned a B.A. in Education at Kansas State University), and her class grew to be the largest of the adult classes in the church. I remember those well-worn SLC's when she had finished a quarter, dog-eared and full of highlighting and notes.

The first lesson I wrote for Ron was a Christmas one, December 19, 2004, on Matthew 1. Since then, I have written 309 lessons. I say "write a lesson" somewhat casually. I usually write just the "Verse by Verse" commentary with the Introduction, Lesson Background, Conclusion, and Final Prayer. Since my Ph.D. is in New Testament, I have written mainly in this area. By my count, I have written 234 New Testament lessons and have written at least one lesson for each of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. I have written the most lessons for the book of Luke (31) followed by Acts (26), Matthew (23), and Romans (20). I have written 75 Old Testament lessons, including 23 of the 39 Old Testament books. In this area, I have written the most lessons for Jeremiah (12), followed by Isaiah (11), and Psalms (9).

Observations

1. Writing these lessons draws on everything I have learned from my advanced study of the Bible. I am using high-level commentaries, checking Greek and Hebrew texts, and applying exegetical skills I learned from people like Beauford Bryant, Robert Hull, Walter Kaiser, Grant Osborne, and D.A.

Carson. I attempt to maintain a clear, fresh reading of the assigned text that can be understood by teachers and students with no more than a basic high school education. It is a great challenge.

2. The lack of Bible literacy in churches today is astounding. Adult Bible School classes have largely disappeared, crowded out by the need for more children's classrooms or lack of teachers. Preachers rarely venture outside popular books like Acts, Philippians, or John to wrestle with other Bible books. Many church members get Bible instruction through online videos or podcasts, and the quality and integrity of these varies widely. The need for the SLC is greater than ever. Writing for this publication is the most important thing I have ever done in my professional life or ministry career. It has touched millions of lives, making it a fearful responsibility.
3. While Standard Publishing was founded and prospered with the churches of the Stone-Campbell Movement in mind, its constituency has grown far beyond that. The SLC is not the place to advance sectarian views on baptism or congregational structure that have become traditional for us. Yet, because the lessons are simply based on the Bible, Restoration principles naturally emerge. An example of this is the lesson I wrote for January 11, 2015, on John 17. This included John 17:21,

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

In this lesson, I was able to rehearse the words of Thomas Campbell in the Declaration and Address, that the church was "essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one." It was an opportunity to expound on the old motto, "When the church is **one**, the world will be **won**."

Experiences: Two Favorites

More than once, I have been asked to teach a lesson I wrote when speaking in a local church. Two favorites:

1. I was doing interim preaching for the church in Grinnell, Iowa. Between the two services, I dropped in to one of their adult Sunday School classes. The teacher, who didn't know me well, looked at me and said, "Are the Mark Krause who writes lessons for the *Standard Lesson Commentary*?" I said I was. He said, "Well you wrote the lesson for this week. Would you like to teach it?"
2. My Aunt Kay was a member of the First Christian Church in El Dorado, Kansas, a Disciples of Christ congregation. A conservative church, they had been using the SLC for years and when she

realized I was one of the writers, she finagled an invitation for me to come down to El Dorado, teach a lesson to the gathered adult classes, and preach for their morning worship service.

For me to be asked to contribute to the *Standard Lesson Commentary* was an overwhelming honor. I just wish my mother had lived to be able to teach one of my lessons.