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GOD'S WORD: FIRST, LAST AND FINAL

by Jim Stauffer

The greatest problem we face in Bible study today is the same as has been the case throughout history.

Some of the best Bible studies men have published stall quickly when the student is presented the dilemma of God's word or what he has heard from men he respects.

What is particularly frustrating is to hear someone staunchly defend the doctrines of men without the consultation of Scripture. Or to have someone quote a passage such as **John 3:16** in support of salvation by faith only while ignoring all the great men of faith in the Bible who are described as faithful due to their obedience (**Heb. 11**).

Jesus condemned the precepts of men in **Mat. 15:9** in response to the strange choice of the scribes and Pharisees to honor the tradition of their forefathers concerning washing of the hands while ignoring the command of God to honor their fathers and mothers.

One way many false religious doctrines have emerged is through the rationale, "The Bible doesn't condemn it." Take a look at the example of a faithful King of Israel, David.

During the reign of King Saul, the Ark of the Covenant was lost to the Philistines. Much evil came to them so they attempted to return it to Israel. First it went to Beth-shemesh where many died at the hand of God for unlawfully looking inside the Ark. It finally came to Kiriath-jearim. King Saul made no attempt to return it to Jerusalem.

In **1 Chron. 13** David prepares the people for the venture to Kiriath-jearim to return the Ark to Jerusalem. **1 Chron. 13:7** says they carried the Ark on a new cart.

We should remind ourselves Moses was given instructions at the time the Ark was made, to put rings on the sides where poles would be inserted for the Levites to carry it on their shoulders. Nothing was mentioned about transporting it on a cart. God did not authorize a cart. God did not tell them not to use a cart. God told them to carry it on the shoulders of the Levites using the poles placed through the rings on its sides.

Back to the story of transporting the Ark on a new cart. **1 Chron. 13** tells us the oxen nearly upset the Ark and Uzza, one of the drivers of the cart, touched it in an effort to stabilize it. God, in His anger, struck Uzza down because he violated the law by touching the Ark. David then had the Levites transport the Ark in the manner God had specified because, *the Lord our God made an outburst on us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance.* (**1 Chron. 15:13**)

This is but one of many examples of men who decided to serve God according to their own ideas and were faced with God's displeasure.

When will we read of instances like this and begin to recognize they are revealed as instruction to us? Paul says they are given to help us avoid the mistakes of those before us (**1 Cor. 10:6**).

Who then among us wishes to dismiss baptism as vital to salvation in the face of **Mk. 16:16**? Which of us will stand before the Lord and defend one of the "new carts" of today, the instrument of music in worship, when everywhere we read of the New Testament church, they sang and made melody in their hearts? They sang in spirit and in truth. (**Eph. 5:19; 1 Cor. 14:15**)

RETHINKING OUR CONCEPTS

Over the past couple of centuries, “generic” Christianity has been a pretty comfortable endeavor in the United States. After all, those who founded this country were strongly influenced by principles and concepts that are generally associated with Christianity. Religious people have historically been held in some respect in our nation. American culture has long been infused with Judeo-Christian ethics and values – honesty, integrity, benevolence, justice, sexual morality, etc. The average person was expected to manifest such qualities, so those who embraced the gospel of Christ were not so very distinct from those who did not. That is not to say that there has been no ungodliness or hypocrisy or shame in our background, but there has consistently been a powerful element of religious influence and thus followers of Jesus have probably spent more time and effort distinguishing ourselves from perversions of Christianity than we have distinguishing ourselves from the world around us.

However, while we weren’t looking – or at least not looking too closely – things changed. Dishonesty and corruption are rampant in business, government, community, education. Divorce and co-habitation (once deemed shameful) are commonplace, and hyphenated relationships are dissolving the natural affections of kinship which counteract problems like neglect, sexual abuse, and domestic violence. Sexual promiscuity and pornography have promoted open homosexuality and transgenderism. Materialism encourages sloth, entitlement, greed. Scientific advancement and technology are hailed as humanistic evidence against religious superstition and ignorance. Entertainment and recreation are becoming the end all, be all of daily life and our cultural heroes are known more for their athletic or acting prowess than for their character or wisdom. Mass media appears to promote an agenda of moral liberalism and we are increasingly glued to our phones, tablets and computer screens, addicted to the drug of text messaging and “look at me” social media. Stir in the perversion and dilution of true Christianity in this nation, as religious leaders have pandered to numbers, money and entertainment, thus producing legions of nominal Christians who have very little conviction and even less understanding of God’s Word. Wash it all down with alcohol, legalized pot or the prescription drug of choice and there you have it. And don’t dare criticize anyone or suggest that their behavior is unacceptable, offensive, or sinful. Toleration is the mantra of the day.

It ain’t Kansas anymore, Toto.

It seems to me that folks who are serious about their discipleship are nervous - even afraid - about the future of our country. Perhaps, however, we shouldn’t be so shocked about what’s transpiring. After all, mankind has proven historically that we tend toward

moral entropy. We are good at giving in to our desires. Godliness is demanding of some discipline, whereas ungodliness demands little of us. It’s easy, lazy, momentarily gratifying. And Satan is very very good at pushing those “lust” buttons. There’s a reason that Jesus refers to him as *“the ruler of this world”* ([John 12.31](#); [14.30](#); [16.11](#)). If history repeats itself, then we should have seen this coming. Thus, real disciples likely have some reason for concern. I don’t know what’s coming next. I don’t know how the recent election will impact our lives as Christians, but it is a bit alarming that we are so concerned for “making America great again” that Christians have supported en masse men that we would have never supported twenty years ago. I don’t know what will happen with upcoming supreme court nominations, nor with international relations, nor with such moral issues as abortion, “gay rights”, or the legalization of marijuana. Will free speech and religious liberty continue to be guaranteed rights, or will the average sermon on sexual immorality, dishonesty, or greed be construed as “hate speech”? Nor can I predict what will come in the next years or decades as my children try to serve the Lord amidst increasing ungodliness. I have some real concern for them and for their children. But then, literally thousands upon thousands of people have served the Lord in far more oppressive circumstances than they are likely to face. I really do hope that they embrace the promise of eternal glory in such measure that they maintain their faith. Indeed, some fear for the future is justified. But I wonder....are we fearful that we won’t be able to serve the Lord, or that we won’t be able to serve Him comfortably? We’ve had it easy our whole life. Is that what we’re really worried about?

Perhaps this open moral shift in American society should prompt real disciples of Jesus to rethink some of our concepts and understandings. We are gravely concerned for the future of our nation – understandably so. Yet this is probably a pretty good time to be reminded about the government that should be the object of our focus: the kingdom of God.

I would propose that most Christians in this country tend to think of our service to God in terms of “church” membership. The establishment and definition of various religious organizations throughout history has essentially dominated our concepts about serving God. We often tend to identify ourselves more by affiliation with a particular religious group than with our Lord. That has certainly been true of denominationalism (hence the descriptive name), and in reaction to such, of those who have tried to avoid denominationalism. In practical terms, religious people see ourselves as a “member of the church” rather than a disciple of Jesus Christ. Oh, sure, reading this we think, “Wait a minute! I do follow Jesus!” But unless this point is made, I think our default setting is church membership. I do not want in any way to undermine the import of saved people (the “church”).

After all, it is this group of people that God points to in proof of His “*manifold wisdom*” (**Eph. 3.10**), and clearly we have relationships and obligations that are connected to our place among other Christians in the body of Christ (**Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 4.11f**). But there is a much grander concept in the Bible that impacts our service to God, and that real Christians in America (and in every other nation) need to embrace now. We are not Americans who happen to be Christians. We are citizens of the kingdom of God, subjects of Christ our King, who happen to be living in the United States.

The resounding promise of OT prophecy is that God would one day set up an eternal kingdom with His King upon the throne and that this King would reign over all creation (**Dan. 2.44; 7.13-14; Ps. 2; Ps. 110**; etc.). Jesus preached the good news of this kingdom (**Mt. 4.23f; 9.35f**); claimed His position as King (**Jn. 18.33-37**); died to save any who would accept His rule; was raised in victory over His enemies (**1 Cor. 15.19f; Heb. 2.14-15**); and ascended to sit at God’s right hand and exercise His rule (**Mt. 28.18f; Acts 2.32f**). The subject of His teaching on the earth and that of His apostles was not merely the creation of a group of saved people, but the fulfillment of a promised government – God’s kingdom with God’s King upon the throne. Does that undermine the import of the church – God’s people? Of course not. But it does underscore that there is something much bigger and more powerful than God’s people at work here. We are those who have accepted Christ’s rule and given ourselves to His service. His blood has redeemed us so that we might be qualified to live forever in His presence as the citizens of His kingdom. But the great promise of redemption is to be realized in the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is God’s King, sitting upon an eternal throne, ruling a government that will never be destroyed and which transcends the limitations of this temporal existence. Which means that, no matter what happens in America or any other nation, God rules. And God rules victoriously. Thus our loyalty, passion, and focus needs to be on the promotion of and service to that kingdom (**Mt. 6.33**). We are resident aliens – strangers and pilgrims – not only on this earth but in this nation (**1 Pet. 2.9f; Heb. 11.13**). The hope of the ages is not to be found in a return of America to her “religious” roots. It would be nice to see, and certainly more comfortable for Christians. Instead, the hope of the ages sits upon His throne right now, calling for His people to maintain their trust in His rule, until He brings this world to a conclusion and transforms His people into our eternal bodies, suited for everlasting association with our King and our God. Maybe now is a good time to realize just who we are, and Whose we are. We are much more than religious Americans and members of Christ’s church. We stand as God’s people before the eternal throne of our omniscient and omnipotent King. What have we to fear?

Russ Bowman; focusmagazine.org

FAITHFUL IN ASSEMBLING?

Is a car that starts 7 times out of 10 faithful? Is a refrigerator that only quits once a month faithful? Is your paper boy faithful if he misses delivering your paper only two or three times a week? If your hot water heater greets you with hot water five mornings out of seven, would you call it faithful or would you call a plumber? If you don't come to work one or two mornings a week, would your boss consider you faithful -- or unemployed? If you attend worship and Bible study services in a similar manner, missing only occasionally, coming most of the time. . . ARE YOU FAITHFUL?

Take time to read **Hebrews 10:25**.

--Author Unknown--

Taken from Lincoln Bible Reader

Fred Craddock, in an address to ministers, caught the practical implications of consecration. "To give my life for Christ appears glorious," he said. "To pour myself out for others. . . to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom -- I'll do it. I'm ready, Lord, to go out in a blaze of glory. "We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table-- 'Here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it all.' But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbor kid's troubles instead of saying, 'Get lost.' Go to a committee meeting. Give a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home. Usually giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it's harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul.

Darryl Bell.

The following story illustrates how some of us use the word of God as our guide.

Walter Knight told of an old Scottish woman who went from home to home across the countryside selling thread, buttons, and shoestrings. When she came to an unmarked crossroad, she would toss a stick into the air and go in the direction the stick pointed when it landed. One day, however, she was seen tossing the stick up several times. "Why do you toss the stick more than once?" someone asked. "Because," replied the woman, "it keeps pointing to the left, and I want to take the road on the right." She then dutifully kept throwing the stick into the air until it pointed the way she wanted to go!

Today in the Word, May, 1989.

Eph. 2:19 So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; 21 in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord;

1 Pet. 2:9 But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

Psa. 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.

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SUNDAY SERMON: THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP



What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10