

The Best Thing We Can Do for America is
Cleanse the Church

By Sonny Childs



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Introduction

"Breathe, Sonny! Breathe!"

That's what I kept telling myself on election night. The outcome was so important to the safety of my family and, more importantly, it had the potential of being devastating to the freedom of the church. It was truly a historic night!

But, my friends, there is no time to celebrate. God has only given us a momentary reprieve. At best, we have two years until the next election cycle will once again put our resolve to the test. We are just one vote shy of a Supreme Court that can radically challenge the core of Christian values and bring significant limitations, even outright persecution against the church. Did we get close enough to the edge? Are we awake? Will our alarm translate into our resolve?

Within this book, we will highlight a series of vital actions that must be taken immediately in order to communicate to Heaven that we have learned our lesson and we appreciate this momentary reprieve.

Illegal Aliens Among the Church (Showing Them the Door)

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Important Note: In order to circumvent the inevitable naysayers, it is important that I make this disclaimer. America is NOT the kingdom of God. While she has been irrefutably advantaged by Divine providence, America is only one nation in a long line of nations who have been blessed because God's children live within the nation. Donald Trump is not our Savior. He is only one ruler in a long line of rulers who has been given the opportunity to protect and promote God's children. Should he falter, like Nebuchadnezzar, he could easily find himself grazing like a cow on the front lawn.

Christians are the salt of the earth and the preservative of a nation. When we passionately turn our hearts toward God, it matters little who is in the palace or the White House, God WILL move on our behalf. On the other hand, when there is sin in the camp, God's blessing will be removed from us.

Application: The absolute best thing we can do for America is cleanse the church.

Illegal Aliens Among the Church

A heated debate about the best way to deal with illegal aliens now dominates our national dialogue. As it does, I pray that we will also be reminded of the much more important issue - illegal aliens masquerading as church members.

There are two primary reasons that an alien is illegal:

They have never been properly taught about the lawful way to gain citizenship.

They have criminally disregarded the process and placed their own will ahead of the law.

Ironically, those are the very same reasons that illegal aliens attempt to be part of the church.

Q: How do we deal with these two groups?

A: In very different ways!

The first group must be shown the proper way to enter the kingdom.

This group must be taught the commanded principle of entering through the front door. Much like in America, for too many years, self-serving leaders have disregarded the need to enforce the law and have not only enticed illegal aliens through the back door, but have rewritten God's law and have made a place for them as if they had been officially added to the church. (Study Acts 2:47 and Romans 6:3-4. Only God adds to the church and only those who enter through baptism are added.)

There are two very sad results to the deception of "back door" citizenship.

The perceived value of true citizenship is diluted.

The alien is led to believe he is a citizen when in reality he is only an accepted imposter.

In Romans 6:3-4, the Holy Spirit gives this simple description of the front door entrance, "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Baptism is the very threshold of entering into Christ. It is the precise moment at which a person discards his citizenship in the world and accepts his citizenship in the Kingdom.

Q: If baptism puts us into Christ (Romans 6:3-4), how can a person be a saved

member of the Kingdom without making the free will choice to be baptized into Christ?

A: They cannot! If a person is not in Christ, they are not in the church. They might attend services regularly and they might participate in her many programs, but if they are not in Christ, they are not in the church. They might even be a seminary graduate and an "officially" ordained pastor with many years of experience, but if they are not in Christ, they are not in the church. (Study Matthew 7:21-23.) They are self-diluted illegal aliens.

Note this! Baptism is essential for salvation and for citizenship. To be in the Kingdom, you must enter through the lawful door called baptism. Have you been baptized for the purpose of removing sin (Romans 6:3-4, Acts 2:38)? Does your preacher, pastor or pope preach baptism for the remission of sins? Be careful who you trust. Human accolades do not replace Divine command.

The second group, those who criminally disregard the process and place their own will ahead of the law, must be shown the exit.

This group is primarily made up of false teachers; those who should know better, but refuse to cast off their selfish ambitions and submit to the whole counsel of God. In the next chapter we will look at the topic, "Draining the Swamp (Exposing and Removing False Teachers)." I pray that you will join this revolutionary call to arms.

Conclusion - Aliens Among Us!

Just as America has cast a blind eye toward those who circumvent the law and have assumed an undocumented status, the church has also been too casual with the enforcement of God's standards for citizenship. For centuries, a group of religious elitists has promoted a doctrine of human will over Divine command. From Catholicism to Calvinism to Reformed Theology, Christianity has labored under the intellectual slavery of those who elevate their will above the inspired Word of God. In order to communicate to Heaven that we have learned our lesson and we appreciate this momentary reprieve, illegal aliens must either be invited through the front door or purged from our midst.

Draining the Swamp

"Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel promised Monday to defy President-elect Donald Trump's deportation orders and vowed that the city will always be a so-called sanctuary city.

Chicago laws prohibit government workers and police officers from asking the locals about their immigration status, according to the Chicago Tribune. Emanuel reaffirmed that the policy will continue."

(Source: <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2016/11/15/mayor-says-chicago-will-always-be-sanctuary-city-in-face-deportation-threats.html>)

Much like the American problem of government officials who circumvent the law, the church is also suffering from ivory tower elitists. In spite of the clearly defined identifying marks of a true Christian, these self-servants circumvent God's law in order to build their own popularity and increase their own power. Illegal aliens remain among us and God's blessing is compromised.

For centuries, the flock of God has been coerced away from the pure water of biblical authority and pulled toward the murky swamp of human doctrine. Christians have blindly followed religious leaders who collect to themselves the most human accolades. We have allowed ourselves to be poisoned by false teachers and led to assume spiritual health when, in fact, we are rotting from the inside out.

If judgment is to begin at the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17), then the house of the Lord needs to rise up and throw off those who are poisoning the water. In order to communicate with Heaven that we have learned our lesson and we appreciate this momentary reprieve, false teachers must be exposed and removed. It's time to drain the swamp!

There are two major types of false teachers:

There are those who legitimately do not know better.

There are those who intentionally exploit their position to mislead.

Q: How do we deal with these two groups?

A: In very different ways!

The first group should be dealt with according to the example of Acts 18:24-26 (NIV).

Notice that Apollos was a "learned man, with a thorough knowledge of Scripture." He was much like many church leaders of today who boast seminary experiences and lofty Bible degrees. Apollos presented what he knew and there is no indication from Scripture that he should have done otherwise. However, when the "way of God" was explained to him "more adequately," he became accountable for a change in message. It was his responsibility to immediately begin speaking more accurately.

Important Note: James 3:1 gives a very stiff warning against those who are ill prepared to teach. The salvation process is the absolute most important teaching of all. It was the topic of Christ's final assignment (Matthew 28:18-19, Mark 16:15-16). It was the lifelong passion of Christ's closest friends and the central theme of the church in the book of Acts. With it, we elevate the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ or we detract from it (Romans 6:3-4).

Application: ALL THOSE who are allowed to stand before the church in a teaching role MUST be expected to teach the subject of salvation accurately!

The second group, those who intentionally exploit their position to mislead, must be dealt with swiftly and firmly.

While no one wants to think of themselves or their preacher as being part of this group, the fact of the matter is this - authority is everything! When Scriptural authority is watered down by ongoing quotes from uninspired religious leaders and deference is given to church councils or creeds, it is time for the preacher, the pastor, or the pope to be called on the carpet. They stand in direct conflict with the authority of God and, by tolerating their sin in our camp, we are impeding the blessing of God. It is time for a call to arms (Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12, 1 John 4:1). It is time to purge the church of self-serving false teachers!

Many men have gone out into the world claiming to have been commissioned by God, but their end clearly proves they were little more than impostors. So how is one to know who is a true messenger of God?

Consider the two following guidelines:

1. Judge Not By Worldly Values

First, you must never judge the worth of the messenger by the value that the world places on him. Remember Joseph. He was a slave and a prisoner, yet he saved an entire nation and preserved the bloodline of Christ.

The proof is not in a worldly position. Moses was a slave child. Rahab was a harlot. Peter worked the fishing boats. Look for someone whose inheritance is in Heaven.

The proof is not in earthly titles. For too long, the church has blindly followed college Bible professors with worldly degrees and accepted all that "educated" men would suggest. The church must look beyond the diplomas and worldly accolades. Look for someone who seeks only the praises of Heaven.

The proof of a genuine servant of God does not come from this world. The proof is in the working of God in his life.

2. Judge By Heaven's Values

Consider the words of 1 John 4:1, 5 (NIV), "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world... They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them."

In this revealing passage, the Holy Spirit of God gives us three important ways to "Test the spirits" of "false prophets."

"They are from the world" - Messengers who have never divorced themselves from the priorities of the world are not the messengers of God. (Examples: Television evangelists who beg for money yet wear expensive jewelry, cake their faces with make-up, and display elaborate backdrops for their viewing audience. Church leaders who spend more on their lavished buildings than they do on evangelism.)

"They... speak from the viewpoint of the world"- In 1 Corinthians 2:13-14, Paul says this about the true messenger of God, "...we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." Messengers who attract an audience with a worldly viewpoint are not the messengers of God. (Example: Those who would teach the politically correct view that "We are all going to Heaven just by different routes.")

"...the world listens to them." - Perhaps the greatest evidence of a true messenger of God is the crowd that gathers around him. Does he gather to himself deeply passionate, spiritual students of Christ or is he surrounded by the spiritually superficial who are devoted to religious performances? As was said in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him." Spiritual truths are not often popular with the world.

Spiritual truths are not always accepted within the church either. Many of the "spiritually superficial" are the false teachers who hide behind religious titles and positions even within the church. They are the ones who would bind human laws as if they were divinely given. They are the ones who would strain at a legalism and swallow a false doctrine that promotes perfect performance over passionate surrender. Yes, false teachers can even be found within the church. The legalist likes to point to the liberal and the liberal does the same for the legalist. But, in truth, they are both impostors of the messenger of God.

So, who is the true messenger of God?

Find the person who struggles, but never gives up. Find the one who speaks with a powerful tongue, but loves with the heart of a servant. Find the one whose life journey demonstrates a God-given purpose. Find the one who always puts the undiluted Word of God ahead of their own opinion or worldly comforts. Find the one who inspires repentance, change, and spiritual growth. Find that person and you will have found a true messenger of God.

Conclusion

For far too long, the church has suffered under the heavy hand of the leaders who deflect the blessing of God by pursuing their own self-serving agendas. They have poisoned the water with self-fulfilling doctrines and have given millions of listeners false hope with their half truths about the salvation process. In order to communicate with Heaven that we have learned our lesson and we appreciate this momentary reprieve, we must drain the swamp.

Spoiled, Selfish, and Entitled

A popular meme on Facebook displays a split screen with a picture above and below. The top picture shows brave young men during World War 2 facing impossible odds yet courageously storming a beach in order to protect the world. The lower picture shows several college students who have decorated themselves with purple hair, outlandish outfits, and other counter-cultural symbols of self-expression. A caption reads, "1944: 18 year olds storm the beach of Normandy into almost certain death. 2016: 18 year olds need a safe place because words hurt."

Another meme shows a great mass of professional protestors blocking a city street. The caption reads, "This is what happens when you give children a trophy for losing."

Q: Is it possible that we, the church, are directly responsible for empowering these selfish attitudes of entitlement?

One more meme:

The picture simply shows a sign in front of the St. Arnold Community Church. It displays the following schedule of worship services:

Classic Service 8 AM
Contemporary 9 AM
Mid Century Modern 10 AM
Post Modern 11 AM
Boomer Service Noon
Millenials 1 PM
Blended Service 2 PM
Happy Hour Service 4 PM

When grace is taught as an entitlement package (Reformed Theology - Calvinism redesigned) rather than an investment exchange (God and us, John 3:16), the younger generation grows up treasuring their desires and opinions over all other authority standards - including the Word of God.

The Condition of Christendom

Far too often, this is the sad condition of Christendom in America today. "Worship services" are filled with self-gratifying entertainment, "sermons" are filled with ear-tickling feel-good stories, "fellowship" is filled with all the freedoms of a "lost in the crowd" anonymity, and the salvation doctrine of transformation through death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4) is reduced to "the sinner's prayer." We have tolerated the entitlement values of a failed culture and even brought them into the church. Someone needs to call out the false teachers!

A friend once challenged me to explain why I am so relentless in my attacks on Calvinism. Below is my response:

Let me ask you a question? Do you believe that grace comes because God unconditionally elects us? Do you believe He pre-selects us to either go to Heaven or to Hell? (That is the second pillar in the 5 core teachings of Calvinism which leads to Reformed Theology.) Before you answer, please understand what that means.

According to the first pillar, you are totally depraved. You have no positive energy, not even the ability to ask God for help.

According to the second pillar, "Unconditional Election," you were born a sinner and God pre-chose you for damnation or salvation without giving any consideration to the choices you would make.

Then there is the third pillar of Calvinism, "Limited Atonement." If some are unconditionally elected, it stands to reason that the rest are unconditionally rejected. No matter what they do in life, they are pre-damned by God. Given their hopeless condition, God chooses not to waste His Son's blood on them. Atonement is limited to those who God pre-chose for salvation.

Of course, when a person believes that atonement is limited by God's pre-choice, it naturally follows that grace is also irresistible (the fourth pillar of Calvinism). In other words, grace is not a gift, it is an assignment.

Finally, because grace is assigned not accepted, the last pillar also follows, "Perseverance of the Saints." This is the infamous doctrine of "once saved, always saved." If you had nothing to do with accepting grace, why would you have anything to do with maintaining it?

And there's the rub! The doctrine of grace without responsibility leads to entitlement conclusions and human assumptions that preempt biblical authority.

Example: Reformed Theologists do not believe that baptism saves. How could they? Baptism requires a responsible choice on the part of the sinner to accept grace. Yet, notice what Peter said in the very first invitation of the very first sermon on the very first day of the church. Remember, he is speaking to folks who just found out they killed the Messiah and are frantically searching for a solution. "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:38, NKJV)

Notice, Peter did not say you are unconditionally elected or rejected. He said make a choice. He said that remission of their sin was possible if they made the right choice. He said that the gift of the Holy Spirit was dependent upon them choosing to accept God's grace.

I challenge you! Go to your preacher or pastor, show them Acts 2:38, and ask them this question, "Does a person have to be baptized in order to be saved?" I promise you, if they are truly a Calvinist, they will begin to dance. They will not give you a direct answer. They will dodge and weave, bringing up unnecessary assumptions about the thief on the cross or Cornelius in Acts 10, all the while circumventing the clear command of Peter in Acts 2:38 as well as their personal responsibility to teach the whole counsel of God. They will undoubtedly answer with human reasoning. Why? Because even though the Bible plainly teaches that baptism saves (John 3:5, Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3-4, Colossians 2:11-12, 1 Peter 3:21, etc.), they would rather embrace the entitlement doctrines of Reformed Theology than submit to the Divine doctrines of Scripture.

When Calvinists promote the human doctrines of the T.U.L.I.P. ("Total Depravity," "Unconditional Election," "Limited Atonement," "Irresistible Grace," and "Perseverance of the Saints"), they set up a very dangerous chain reaction. If election is unconditional and grace is irresistible then eternity is outside the realm of my influence. If I am called to respond to grace without the freedom to accept that grace, then I am responding to an assignment not an invitation. At the end of the day, I have no gift for the King. Even if I do respond to His grace it is not because I chose to respond, it is because I have been pre-conditioned to do so. He gets nothing back that wasn't already under His control. There is no gift for the King!

Conclusion

Unfortunately, the cancerous doctrine I have just described has found its way into every major group within Christendom today. Remember, Reformed Theology (Calvinism repackaged) is not a denomination, it is a dynamic. It is a value system, a religious world view. As such, it threatens all of us, especially the young. Grace without the responsibility to choose it or maintain it makes the perfect complement to the entitlement values at work in the world. It is the perfect promotional ad to draw in a younger generation that has been conditioned to expect something for nothing.

May we never forget, Satan is perfectly happy to allow and even promote all religions that teach a convenient conversion that leads to a self-satisfying system of human opinion. As long as Divine doctrine is always filtered through human doctrine, God's will will always be second. We can build the biggest buildings and erect the highest steeples, we can draw the biggest crowds and claim the

greatest humanitarian efforts, but if God is not first, Satan wins.

That is why we must cleanse the church!

Building a Wall, Part One

As illegal aliens pour across our borders, the talk of building a wall has been met with a divided reaction. Some see it as our moral duty to admit immigrants, regardless of their appreciation for the law. Others celebrate the idea of strict laws and promote the idea of isolationism.

As we have seen throughout this entire book, the church has a parallel problem. Many in Christendom rail against leaders who would suggest that Christianity is exclusive. They cry "Divineness and disunity!" whenever it is suggested that God's laws of inclusion (Acts 2:47, Romans 6:3-4) should be enforced. At the opposite end of the spectrum, others in Christendom celebrate a selfish form of legalism that binds more than God commands. They make laws where there are none and use disputable matters (Romans 14) to keep people out in order to satisfy their own pompous power trips and preferences. Both groups are condemnable and must be called out!

In order to adequately address the topic of "building a wall," we will divide this discussion into two parts:

1. How to Maintain the Holiness of the Church
2. How to Decide If a Matter Should Be Used as a Test of Fellowship.

How to Maintain the Holiness of the Church

Unfortunately, the damnable doctrines of Calvin have led the church into a lengthy period of passivity. Without the free will to accept grace or maintain our election ("Irresistible Grace," "Unconditional Election"), the church grows stagnant and irresponsible. Reform Theology (Calvinism Repackaged) circumvents biblical authority in order to satisfy the desire for a convenient conversion and a "don't judge me" lifestyle. (See the evidence provided in chapter three.)

To cleanse the church, we must re-prioritize the objective of our being. We must re-discover holiness and sanctification. We must re-identify with the goal of being called out (church).

In order to maintain holiness, the church is called to be at least three things:

1. The church is called to be an exclusive group.

Fact: In order to maintain holiness, Christians must be separate and preferential to each other. While neither of those attributes are politically correct, they most certainly are spiritually correct. Notice two passages that record Divinely commanded exclusivity.

2 Corinthians 6:14-17 (NIV) Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord."

While passages like this make us very uncomfortable, perhaps it is time to ask ourselves why. Why do we feel awkward espousing a doctrine that is directly commanded by God. Could it be that we have lived so long under the mesmerizing feel good sermons of politically correct Hollywood-style tolerance that we have forgotten how to truly be separate? Could it be that the world condemns exclusivity and, since we want so badly to be like them, we search for ways to water down Scripture and dilute exclusive holiness?

Read the passage again. Read the entire context again. Notice the opening sentence again. Focus on the command, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord." What could these words possibly mean other than Christians are called to exclusive holiness?

Galatians 6:9-10 (NIV) Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Not only does holy exclusivity mean that we must be separate from the world, it also means that we must be preferential toward each other.

Of course, we are to do good to "all people," but that is not the theme of this point. Don't let the warm fuzzy preaching of tolerance entice you to rush past the application of that last phrase, "especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

Holiness, by its very nature, builds a wall between itself and that which is unholy. The very best thing we can do for America is cleanse the church with holy exclusivity.

2. The church is called to be an inclusive group.

Unlike Calvinism, which teaches "Limited Atonement" (Jesus' blood wasn't wasted on the masses who are created to be damned anyway), the Bible actually teaches that God created everyone with the hope of responsible choices. (See <http://www.heybrothersonny.com/predestination-1.html>.) Forget all the quotations

from flawed Reformation leaders; notice what God says.

John 3:16 (NIV) For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

2 Peter 3:9 (NIV) The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Acts 17:26-27 (NIV) From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.

Mark 16:15-16 (NIV) Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Holiness by its very nature builds a wall, then actively invites all those who are unholy to cleanse themselves and come inside (Romans 6:3-4). The very best thing we can do for America is cleanse the church with holy inclusiveness.

3. The church is a conclusive group.

There is only one church and only those added by God are in it (Acts 2:47). That said, it must be understood that the church is not a building and it is not limited to a single collection of Christians. The church is a Divine description of ALL those who have heard His calling and, through a freewill choice to accept and maintain grace (2 Peter 1:10), have come out of the world.

Although there are many biblical descriptions of the church, we are never commanded to use just one. For that reason, names alone should not be trusted. The only way to determine if a person is truly a member of the church is to examine the paperwork (Bible). Have they entered into Christ by being baptized for the remission of sins (Romans 6:3-4, Acts 2:38)?

The sad reality is this, there are masses of people all around the world who have been duped into believing they are in the church when they are not. There are a countless number of preachers and pastors who stand before very large groups of religious people every Sunday and are trusted to proclaim the word of God, yet, they, themselves, have never obeyed the Divine command to enter Christ

through baptism. Study Matthew 7:21-23. Good intentions and human accolades are not enough! Only those who do the will of the Father are added to the church (Acts 2:47) and only those who honor the son (Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3-4) are doing the will of the Father. Have you entered Christ by being baptized for the remission of sins?

Holiness, by its very nature, builds a wall then guards it with Divine conclusions. The very best thing we can do for America is cleanse the church with holy conclusiveness.

Conclusion

In order to be presentable for the Bridegroom and protected by the Bridegroom's Father, the church must be holy. We must be exclusive, inclusive, and conclusive.

In part 2 of "Building a Wall," we will conclude our study by looking at one of the most dividing/unifying principles in Scripture - how to decide if a matter should be used as a test of fellowship.

Building a Wall, Part Two

In this concluding section, we will look at one of the most dividing/unifying principles in Scripture - how to decide if a matter should be used as a test of fellowship.

As the growing threats of ISIS and other anti-Christ forces brutalize Christians in the Middle East, many are asking what Christians can do here at home in order to unite forces and better prepare. While efforts by the media, ACLU, and vigilante atheist groups grow in their bid to silence America's Christians, many are pleading for stronger unity among Christian denominations.

While I believe that a fragmented Christian community offers a very poor defense against the coming darkness, I also believe that unity at all cost is a proven mistake. For hundreds of years, the denominational world has suggested that greater unity requires greater compromise. I ask you, how is that working out? Much like the politically correct propaganda of "color blindness" has not solved racial injustice, "denominational blindness" will not solve divisiveness within Christendom. Denying reality is rarely effective.

Perhaps the key to unity within Christendom is not denying our differences, but rather using our differences as a sifting agent to magnify the importance of Divine authority.

How to Decide If a Matter Should Be Used as a Test of Fellowship

Think of a pebble being dropped into a pool of water. Consider the rings that ripple outward from the center. If you wanted to retrieve the pebble, the best place to look would be at the center of those ripples. So it is with life. The source of our beginning and the core of our most intimate fellowship is found in the center. In order to return to the source, we must journey back through the rings.

Fellowship of the Rings

The journey of life is all about finding purpose. Why are we here? Who put us here? What does He expect of us? What can we do to please Him? By God's design, answers are found while traveling toward the intense fellowship at the center of the rings. Each of us are at different stages along that line of progression and our level of fellowship is governed accordingly.

Our journey begins on the outskirts of life's ripples. As newborn infants, we know only one thing - human value. Self-awareness leads us to place ultimate importance upon our own needs. As those needs are met by others, we bond with them and our appreciation for human value grows even more. When God launches each person onto the timeline of their human experience, He does so at this level. Like a father encouraging his child to take her first step, He coaxes us

toward the next ripple of fellowship then the next and the next. Even atheists experience this outer ring and do, therefore, have at least a diluted level of fellowship with those who have journeyed further.

In the next ring, we begin to process more about the world around us. Obvious design leads us to conclude that there must be a Designer. We fascinate over creation and our curiosity leads us to a superficial worship. Even though, for most, curiosity never leads them to a full commitment, the fellowship experienced at this level is much deeper than it is for those who remain at the outer ring.

The journey into the next ring presents the most difficult transition thus far. In this ring, we confront the fragility of the human experience. The physical realm begins to falter and we look beyond our casual acknowledgement of a Designer, seeking hope from beyond the material world. In a state of sinful darkness, our urgent conviction causes us to grope about for answers. We call out, "What must be done to gain the favor of the One Who exercises ultimate control over my existence?" We learn that our sin has led to the death of God's one and only Son. We plead for a solution and we mentally accept that Jesus is that solution.

Fellowship within this ring has the potential to bring unity when worldly issues are concerned. Christians can and should cooperate to achieve goals involving family values, world hunger, poverty, disease, and hundreds of other earthly issues. Unity within this ring is essential for physical survival. This is the level at which the majority of Christians are able to join forces against ISIS, the ACLU, vigilante atheist groups, and any other worldly persecution that threatens Christ-likeness. This is the level that offers the greatest potential of numeric unity.

However...

Even though the potential fortification we can build within this third ring is substantial, it is far from being complete. Unity at this level only allows us to fight for physical comforts. It only draws us together over issues of the material realm. True spiritualism can only be found within the center ring. Only through a water/Spirit rebirth (John 3:5) can ultimate fellowship with the Creator and His children be experienced.

The journey into the center ring is the most important transition of all (Romans 6:3-4). Its importance is so great that Satan concentrates his legions and intensifies his efforts at this point. He invests more of his deceptive energy at the edge of this ring than he does at any other place within the human experience. Like a wolf in sheep's clothing, he masquerades as an angel of light. He tickles the ears of the gullible and convinces the masses that their journey is complete. "Conviction is enough," he whispers. "Going any further would only be an insult to God. You can't earn your own salvation! Stop here. Take your ease. Eat, drink and be merry! You've gone far enough."

Unfortunately, this is the level at which most religious people end their journey. The damnable doctrines of Calvinism and other denominational teachings distract travelers from fully journeying into the center ring. The masses come so close, yet Satan's minions successfully convince them to pull up short. Truly the words of Christ are most profound when He warns, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:13-14, NIV)

Conclusion

In order to restore God's blessing to America, the church must look beyond physical security. Spiritual unity at the center of the rings is the goal and we must not pull up short. While many silver-tongued denominational leaders are calling for unity at all cost, it is essential that we resist their shortsightedness and stay on course. To fully take advantage of this temporary reprieve and cleanse the church, we must begin at the entryway.

Romans 6:3-4 (NIV) "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

The church has many areas in need of cleansing, but the most heinous of all are the corrupted versions of God's plan for salvation (entrance into the center ring). This is why I am so relentless with this topic. Why would we start the cleaning inside the front door when the welcome mat is a mud pit?

Q: Have you ever wondered why is it so hard for the religious world to accept the fact that baptism for the remission of sins is essential for salvation? It seems everyone accepts the need for hearing, believing, repenting, and confessing. Why does baptism face such stiff resistance?

A: Satan knows that baptism is the very threshold into Christ (Roman 6:3-4). Satan views those other steps as acceptable losses so long as he can keep us just outside, only one step shy of salvation in Christ.

Until we get back to teaching Acts 2:47, Romans 6:3-4, and Acts 2:38 (God adds those who are baptized into His Son for the purpose of removing sin), our attempts at intimate family fellowship will be without Divine validation. Christendom will try to generate unity, but instead, we will continue to divide along denominational lines of human doctrines.

Because of the entitlement false teachings of grace without any personal responsibility to accept it ("Unconditional election," "Irresponsible grace," etc.), many are trying to have full fellowship with folks who aren't even citizens of the

kingdom. These undocumented aliens may have been awarded human approval, but their names are not recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life (Acts 2:47, Revelation 21:27). Only those who are in Christ are in the center ring (Romans 6:3-4) and only those who are baptized for the remission of sins are in full surrender to the Lamb of God (Acts 2:38).

For centuries, Christianity has labored under the intellectual slavery of those who elevate their will above the inspired Word of God. In order to communicate with Heaven that we have learned our lesson and we appreciate this momentary reprieve, the filth of false teaching must be removed! We must cleanse the church!

Note: Because the word Christian means Christ-like, I have intentionally used it within this book to describe anyone who is pursuing a relationship with Jesus. However, being Christ-like and being Christ-bought can be two very different things. The first implies imitation, the other demands identification, a ransom experienced through immersion in the blood of Christ. Don't pull up short! Be both!

Supplement 1

Necessary Abrasiveness

Unlike today's popular preaching of a "mild mannered Messiah," Jesus was a lightning rod for controversy. He both attracted it and initiated it. (For more information on this topic, request a free PDF copy of my book, "The Gentle Jesus, Not Always!")

It was that approach which caused many, including His own family, to conclude that Jesus was out of touch with the needs of His culture.

Jesus said, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:34-36, NIV)

Jesus publicly pointed out false teachers and referred to them disparagingly as children of hell, "blind fools," "hypocrites," "snakes," and "whitewashed tombs" (Matthew 23, NIV).

Jesus' approach disturbed many people, including His own family. Mark says, "When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" (Mark 3:21, NIV)

Today, there are many folks thinking the same thing about The Lord's messengers who publicly expose false teachers and call for a cleansing of the church. "We need to 'take charge' of you!" they say. "We don't like it when you rock the boat! We've grown weary of all the bickering. Why can't you just overlook the differences and get along?"

But before you side with this secularized warm fuzzy approach to religion, be sure to notice how Jesus responded to the family members who disagreed with His approach and considered Him to be "out of his mind."

Mark 3:32-35, (NIV) "A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.' 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! WHOEVER DOES GOD'S WILL is my brother and sister and mother.'"

Ouch!

Q: Does Jesus think of us as His family if we are unwilling to follow His example and engage in the same level of confrontation in order to cleanse the church?

Supplement 2

Commands and Examples

Hermeneutics is the name scholars have assigned to the principles men have devised to govern the interpretation of God's Word. Unfortunately, this term is also used to mask the intentions of men to manipulate the message and make it fit their pre-conclusions.

In Matthew 15:9 and Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus gave two principles that make up Heaven's hermeneutics. May we always default to God's principles before surrendering to man's.

God's first rule for interpretation is this, all human commands being taught as doctrine are to be condemned because they produce vain worship. Notice Matthew 15:9, "...in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (NKJV)

Second, God commands that His commands be taught and obeyed. "...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20)

In other words, Heaven's hermeneutics (principles of interpreting Scripture) are as follows: 1. Men have no right to make a doctrinal command out of something that God has not commanded. 2. When God gives a command, He expects it to be taught and kept.

Jesus spent a significant amount of His ministry pointing out and combating Pharisaical legalism. He did not oppose their passion for the law. He opposed the countless number of human traditions they had bound upon others as if they were commands of God. It was this opposition to their presumptuous nature that stirred His anger to the point that He called them "whitewashed tombs". (Matthew 23:27)

Just as the Pharisees created human laws in an attempt to return to the Old Law, we too have often placed words in God's mouth in order to establish our pre-conclusions. Binding examples upon others as if they are commands is one of the ways we do this. Consider three dangers that this presents to the modern church.

1. Binding biblical examples as if they are commands promotes selective obedience.

II Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” If we are to take this passage to mean that every word in Scripture carries the same level of authority, then consider the following dilemma.

How much of a New Testament example is binding? Consider communion. The first communion was taken on a Thursday evening as part of the Jewish Passover. The grape juice was taken from a single cup while the observers reclined at a table in an upper room. How many of these details must the modern church follow?

In Acts 20:7, the church at Troas met at the first of the week to “break bread”. If these words mean communion, as many scholars suggest, then perhaps we have more examples to be obeyed. The disciples at Troas also met in an upper room (Acts 20:8). The weekly service mentioned in this text included a message that “continued... unto midnight” (vs. 7). It also included a miraculous healing (vs. 10). Verse 11 indicates that the breaking of bread happened in the evening at or after midnight.

Some would say that taking communion on the first day of every week is a binding example. At the same time, they dismiss the examples of using one cup, meeting in an upper room and breaking bread at an evening service. Why is one detail more significant than the others? Who gets to decide which part of an example is binding and which part is not? If “All scripture” (2 Timothy 3:16) means that every word is equal in authority, then every detail of every example should be fully obeyed.

What about Paul’s example to observe the Old Testament Sabbath and meet regularly with the Jews in their synagogues? (Acts 17:2) It seems that this was also the custom of Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:26) and thousands of other Christians who lived in Jerusalem. (Acts 21:20) Should the modern church bind this well-established biblical example as if it were a command? Paul did say, “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.” (Philippians 3:17) Should we lift Paul’s words out of their context and make them apply across the board to every example that he left for us? If so, then every modern Christian needs to find a synagogue to attend this Saturday.

What about Paul’s example to engage in Old Testament acts of worship in order to reach out to New Testament Jewish Christians? (Acts 21:17-26) Should we give this example the same emphasis that we give a direct command?

What about assembly locations? Never once in all of the New Testament is there a command or example of the early Christians meeting in a church building. Does that mean the silence of Scripture condemns such buildings?

The New Testament does give us six examples of the early church meeting in

homes. Perhaps we should use the same argument here that is often used on other topics. The Bible says we can worship in homes, but it does not say we can worship in church buildings. Should we conclude, therefore, that the silence of Scripture condemns worshipping in church buildings? Should we conclude that these six examples command us to worship in homes?

What about located preachers? Again the Scripture is silent in both command or example of a preacher staying more than three and a half years with one congregation. Is this an example that should be bound upon others and used to draw a line of fellowship?

Who gets to choose which example is binding and which example is not? When biblical examples are bound upon others as if they are commands, the modern church is either forced into selective obedience or into the legalism of obeying every detail of every example given in every part of every Scripture.

2. Binding biblical examples as if they are commands is dangerous, because it opens the door to denominationalism.

When the emphasis is removed from God's direct commands and placed upon human examples, the door to human opinion is left wide open.

The denominational world uses the biblical example of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) for their authority to call regional church leaders into a meeting to decide church policy. If examples are as authoritative as commands, then it is hard to argue with their position.

Some in the denominational world use the examples of Acts 10:44-48 and Acts 19:5-6 as grounds to require a person to speak in tongues as evidence of their salvation.

Some in the denominational world use Paul's example of celibacy as grounds to require their church leaders to be celibate.

Some in the denominational world use the examples of Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 5:32 as their authority to bind communal living upon their followers.

If examples and commands are to receive the same level of authority, then it is very hard to argue with these denominational positions. What right have you and I to say that their favorite example is any less binding than ours? In fact, if we are going to obey all examples as if they are commands, then we have no choice but to embrace many of these denominational views.

3. Perhaps the most dangerous part of lifting an example to the level of a command is what it does to the authority of God's silence.

In Romans 4:15, the Holy Spirit gives this important insight, “And where there is no law there is no transgression.” In other words, you cannot break a law that does not exist. God’s holy silence demands that we too be silent. If God did not command or condemn something, then we have no right to make up a law for Him. We must not command anything of others that God has not commanded and we must not condemn anything in others that God has not condemned. We simply must be silent. (Study Romans 14.)

For many years, restoration Christians have used command, example and necessary inference as their guides to interpreting Scripture. Like sincere Pharisees who simply wanted to restore full obedience to the Old Law, we also desire a return to the pure observance of the New Law. This desire is admirable and it is well worth the investment of all our spiritual energy. But like most great efforts, this pursuit does not come without the temptation to employ human wisdom and human authority along the way. Because God deserves obedience, men often create their own laws to help God reach His goal. In the process, they not only put words in God’s mouth, they also attempt to join Him on His throne of authority. Binding biblical examples as if they were direct commands does this very thing. We must be careful.

Conclusion:

Biblical examples should always be viewed as treasured information. Only a fool would overlook them. Remember the words of Paul, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” (Romans 15:4, NKJV)

But, on the other hand, lifting a biblical example to the same level as a command is also foolish. That flawed principle of interpretation has proven to lead the church down a very dangerous and contentious road. If God wanted something to be viewed as a command, all He had to do was preserve it as a command. Never be guilty of putting words in God’s mouth. Honor examples. Obey commands.

Far too many Restoration Christians have lost their focus! We clearly have the high ground on doctrines of salvation, but some of us have gotten greedy. Instead of taking our stand on issues of command, we have drawn lines based on necessary inference, example and other disputable matters (Romans 14).

The problem is this, the one who concludes there is an INFERENCE is often the same one who decides which things are NECESSARY. And, the one who collects the most supporters for something that is DISPUTABLE is often the same one who decides what MATTERS.

For the sake of the kingdom, we need to return to the Divine hermeneutics of Matthew 28:18-19 (NIV), "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have COMMANDED you."

If we will limit ourselves to using biblical commands for lines of fellowship, Divine hermeneutics will protect us from the man made doctrines that have plagued our fragmented fellowship and distracted us from the high ground.

The Sonny Childs & Family Ministries

Description:

We like to think of ourselves as missionaries to America. Sonny is a full-time author and traveling evangelist. Cindy manages our online work (websites, eNewsletters, social media posts, eBooks, etc.) Gabriel heads up "Keep the Faith!", a postal pen pal project for young people. Bryson and Victoria (daughter-in-law) recruit young people for the Missionaries for America Program, an intense missions training process conducted during the months of June and July.

Mission Statement:

As missionaries to America, we seek to promote the practical, provable Christian advantage.

Your support of this ministry is greatly appreciated!

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