

## 523 Does It Matter What We Believe?

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### God's Answers to Life's Questions

The popular thinking says, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you love Jesus." Many people quote John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." The only problem is that they think love is the only identifying mark of a disciple. Are there any other things that identify a true disciple of the Lord? What distinguishes a Christian from other religious people?

Jesus distinguished his disciples not only by their love (John 13:34-35) but also by their willingness to remain in his Word. Jesus said in John 8:31-32, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." It has always mattered what we believe. We cannot claim to be disciples of Jesus, if we are not willing to abide in his words. That's what makes a person a Christian: listening to, remaining in, and living by His Word. Jesus once asked, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46) Jesus knows who obeys and who does not obey.

For Jesus to be loved as Lord of our lives means that He must rule. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). We merely deceive ourselves if we think it doesn't matter what we believe. In fact, the Bible specifically condemns people who try to change or pervert the gospel. Paul said in Gal. 1:6-9, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!"

No matter who says it—Paul, an angel or anybody, if it doesn't agree with the gospel of Scripture, it is a false gospel. One cannot pervert the gospel and please the Lord. Trying to change what God says leads one to be accursed. This word is anathema, that is to be eternally condemned, to be dedicated to destruction. Frightening!

*It matters whether or not we support error.* John said, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds" (2 John 9-11). While some say this passage speaks only to the deity of Jesus, we reply that there is a principle here that must not be ignored. The principle: to change God's teaching is offensive to God and evil.

All of God's word is sacred. To change any of it, to go beyond its teaching is to take what is Divine and to make it human. Man-made teachings are presumptuous and step into a realm that belongs only to the Lord. We have no right to say to God, "we think our way is better than Your way, so we're going to change the teaching to suit ourselves." Those who teach false doctrines do not have God. Whether we teach a false doctrine or support those who teach a false doctrine, we are guilty of committing an evil deed. It matters to God whether or not we support error. Love means staying with God.

*What God says matters.* Jesus said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). We cannot pick and choose what we like about God's teachings and what we do not like. The standard, which will judge us on the last day, is God's word. *God is God*, and He did not take opinion polls to determine His

will. We live in an age that stresses political correctness, but God is not subject to our culture. While we value changing opinions, God has spoken to all people in all places for all time (Jude 3). His will does not change.

Rather than thinking we can say and do religiously as we please, we should seek God's face and follow His will. The real issue here is who is God and who is man? Are we willing to yield our will to God's will and make Him Lord of our lives? Many people seem to think they can say no to God and live and believe as they wish. God won't know or care, as far as they are concerned. But God does know and does care. We can't believe and practice man-made traditions and expect God to be happy and pleased about it. He wants us to follow His will and to live lives that give glory to His name. You can't serve God and yourself!

Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." These verses surprise most people. They think that nearly everyone is on the right road, but that's not the way things really are. Only a few are on the right road, according to Jesus. The broad way is easy and filled with people. It's going to be popular but tragic. Not many people are willing to study for themselves and find the truth by looking into the words of Jesus.

Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matt. 7:21-23). There is always a difference between talking religiously and living faithfully to the teaching of the Lord. Those who talk about Jesus as Lord but live in lawlessness (where God's law doesn't count) are fooling themselves.

At this point Jesus gives us a tool to distinguish a wise man from a foolish man, one who is saved from one who is lost. In verses 24-27, Jesus said, "*Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock.*" The wise person hears and acts upon what he hears. He does exactly what he is told, rather than substituting in something he prefers.

*"And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall."* (Matt. 7:24-27) Now, the foolish man did something, he built a house; but he did not build it upon the rock. He built it where he wanted—on the sand. It was likely a beautiful house, functional, and comfortable. But he did not do what he was told to do. He did what he wanted to do. He did not act upon the words of Jesus; he acted on his own judgment.

Acting on our own wisdom, our own judgment, rather than obeying God is always foolish. Solomon said in Proverbs 3:5-7, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil." We must believe in God's wisdom, not our own. God sees and knows things we cannot see and know. His understanding is unlimited, that is why we need to trust that what

He teaches is right. Even when we don't understand why He says what He says, we need to trust His wisdom.

Let us, then, begin to ask about what we believe and practice as Christians, "Is this sand or is this rock?" By that, I mean, can we read about this belief or practice in the words Jesus in the New Testament? Or is this a belief or practice that came in later centuries by the invention of men? If we can read that the Christians of the New Testament believed or practiced it, we can have confidence that God approves. But if it is something that began much later and is a departure from the Truth, it has no place in the life of a faithful Christian. We should leave the sand theology and return to the Rock!

Let's test this on what is happening in churches today. It would worth our while to investigate our doctrine and our practices, asking the question, "Is this Biblical or is this something from men?" This would mean that you would have to do some deeper study into the Bible, to see what you would find. About thirty years ago, when I first started preaching in a country church in Oklahoma, I met a wonderful lady named "Oleta." She had been sprinkled as an infant in her church. When she became an adult, she got acquainted with some members of the church of Christ, and they began talking about the Bible.

When some of the members of the church told her that we only baptize by immersion people old enough to believe, she questioned that. The members replied, "Well, that's the way they did it in the Bible." This made Oleta mad. She was just sure that what she had been taught was in the Bible! So, she got out her Bible, studied and studied, looking for verses to justify the sprinkling of infants. The more she read, however, the more she realized that what her friends had told her was right. Oleta said, "I was studying to prove them wrong, and what I did was prove Oleta was wrong." This honest lady saw that even cherished beliefs can be wrong. It wasn't easy for Oleta to come to that conclusion. But she was humble and honest. The fact is that baptism is a burial (Rom. 6:4) and the early church baptized only penitent believers. They also baptized them so that their sins would be forgiven and washed away.

Today, people have the notion that every church is okay, that every doctrine is as good as every other doctrine. But is that so? It may sound neighborly to say such things, but what if you I accept a

"distorted" gospel? What if we are giving false hope to people telling them everything is all right when it is not all right? Wouldn't that be cruel? Wouldn't it be better to stay on safe ground? In the Bible we can read the things that God approves and teaches. We can know what He wills for our lives, for our churches, and for our beliefs. We can build on Rock only when we stay with the words of Jesus. When we get away from that we get on sand. You see, in the mind of Jesus there is Rock, His words, and everything else is sand. The question is if we agree with Him and His words in the New Testament. You may want to be like Oleta and examine what you have believed and see if it is according to what the Bible teaches. Won't you do that?

Jesus went up into a high mountain to pray and took Peter, James and John with him. He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were talking about Jesus' departure. When Peter saw Moses and Elijah, he said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"

God's declaration in Matthew 17:5, "Listen to Him," is still relevant today. There are a thousand voices clamoring for our attention, but God points to His Son. Moses was a great lawgiver, but God points to His Son. Elijah was a great prophet, but God points to His Son. Only Jesus has the words of life (John 6:68). We don't need three tabernacles, we just need the Lord and His Word. "Listen to Him!" Love Him, follow Him, obey Him, serve Him, and share His Word. Nothing else will do.

Today we're offering a pamphlet free of charge, entitled, "Ten Things God Wants in Your Life." It tells of all the wonderful things God wants for you. With all the blessings of God, it is no wonder that we should draw near to Him always. Where are you in your life? Do you have a close, loving, peaceful relationship with God? Do you have peace of mind and heart inside? God hasn't left you; it may be that you have left God. The greatest need of our time is to know God and to draw close to Him again by listening and obeying His Word. Won't you do that?

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