



But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. – Matthew 15:9

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If you're like me you're tired of hearing all the claims and counterclaims about Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. The whole thing has become highly political and threatens to mar the reputation of the court with the American public. I'd say it would also mar the reputation of the Senate, but with all the legislative fiascoes of the last twenty or thirty years I'm not sure that's possible.

But I'm not interested in talking politics in this forum. The facts are that both sides are wrong about just about everything and both are too proud of their own opinions to admit that there might be a better way neither side has yet thought up. That's human nature. We have such a need to be right that we tend to believe our own lies to the point that we forget all sorts of truth.

Religion has a tendency to highly exacerbate that problem. When you think God is on your side, then you believe you have the right to be dogmatic and inflexible with others who disagree with you. Many people think and speak of religious "truth" as if it dwelt in a realm of its own and were not subject to the rules of reason and evidence we require of other truths.

The Bible disagrees. "Taste, and see that the LORD is good." (Ps. 34:8) "Come now, let us reason..." (Isaiah 1:18) These invitations go to everyone, not just to a select few who have "earned" certain human qualifications. An individual who has not "reinvented the wheel" when it comes to their faith does not have a personal faith that can stand the test of tribulation.

I read recently of a journalist who made his belief in God a matter of public knowledge. Once he was asked to join a number of other writers and thinkers in submitting an essay on "What Is Wrong with the World?" His reply, "I am." That recognition of personal weakness and responsibility puts the lie to so many religious people today who seem to think it a virtue to publish their "virtues" to their fellow travelers.

When Jesus was on earth he never called someone to pay more attention to their religious leaders. He did tell people to do what they were told, but followed that with a warning not to do what their religious leaders did. Instead, Jesus called on people to come to him, to follow him, to drink the water he would give them. He even told them once that they would have to eat his flesh and drink his blood.

These repeated calls for people to focus on him would have been the most blatant self-promotion unless he was the solution to the world's problems. But he both was and is. So today we need to draw closer to Jesus and pay more attention to him, rather than trusting someone with a degree in theology to pay attention to Jesus for us.

Does the Bible present difficult questions? Absolutely. Does that mean we should leave it to the “more educated” to study it? Absolutely not! I can testify personally that after a lifetime of daily Bible study I am still learning more about its central message. I don't understand everything I read, but as time passes I understand more and more things.

It would be nice if I could pass those things on to you. But that's not humanly possible. The things I learn are my things, and they can't be yours unless you learn them for yourself in your own personal study. Anyway, I might be the cause of the world's problems, and if you trusted my ideas you might end up worse off than if you hadn't believed anything.

So what's the point in this thing we call religion? It is a matter of fellowship. If we want to follow Jesus' model, then we have to enter religion as a group of peers, not as followers of this person or that person. Paul once chided the people of Corinth for that kind of thinking. “I follow Paul.” “I follow Apollos.” “I follow Christ.” (I can just hear the sanctimonious oneupmanship in that last one!)

We all follow Christ. Like the spokes of a wheel, the closer we get to him as the center of our devotion, the closer we get to one another. “By this everyone will know you follow me, if you love each other.” [personal paraphrase]

May God bless you as you seek to rebuild your faith on a solid rock not cut out with human hands.

Elkanah

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