



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

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I've never been one to enjoy much religious media. Since I have a media background and was raised in a religious family, I have some ties to religious media, but I generally stay away. So it wasn't by choice that I happened to hear a sermon from Dr. D. James Kennedy on a Sunday years ago.

I don't know how many times he preached it, but what I heard was his sermon against "tolerance." He took the position that tolerance was a tool of corrupt liberals to get us to let the worst sinners have a part in our society and culture. The late Dr. Kennedy had mounted a campaign to regain America for Christ.

Let me be brash and a little caustic and say that it would be impossible to REgain the country for Christ because it never belonged to him to begin with. Dr. Kennedy was one of the foremost historical revisionists, selling the idea that the founding fathers were Christians who founded the country on Christian principles.

I could get into the historical details and point out that most of the founding fathers were Deists who viewed most Christians with a bit of distrust. And the principle of religious liberty Dr. Kennedy seemed bent on eliminating got very firm support from one of those men who WAS a Christian, James Monroe.

Those revisionist historians seemed to think that if someone mentioned God or engaged in prayer they were automatically Christians. And the quotations they trot out to suggest that America should become a Christian nation "again" are actually calls by them for religion to fill a role it has no business filling.

True religion is about a single person's relationship with the creator God. That relationship will have an effect on the life of that person, an effect that often leads them to live a more ethical life. But the ethics are a byproduct, not the

main purpose, of true religion. And the ethics in question are personal ethics, not public ethics. So when people expect religion to produce “moral” people they call on it to abandon its real purpose and its divine calling.

And now let's look at that sermon against tolerance. If you take the position that religion is here to make people be good, then tolerating people who don't do good is a problem. But if the goal of religion is personal growth toward selflessness, then intolerance causes, rather than solves problems. My religion will help me “be” good, but it won't help anyone else be good. Nor should it.

Human society is built on authoritarian models in which certain persons get to decide how everyone else should act. So society tends to view religion as providing another level of authoritarian control. Too many religious practitioners gladly give society what it wants, preaching sermons like Dr. Kennedy's that veer away from the Bible's message and give God a bad name among people who think for themselves.

Jesus once described this tendency to his disciples, noting that some of the world's authority figures not only take away people's liberty, but then call themselves “benefactors.” “Not so with you,” Jesus told these future Christian leaders. The true church of Christ will not rely on authority figures, but will rely on the selflessness of individual members to pull diverse members into one body.

In short, if you see a church that relies on top-down, authority-based structures, you can know that it is NOT composed of disciples of Jesus. True disciples will be known by their love, not their submission to human authority.

Those are my thoughts for tonight.

Elkanah

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