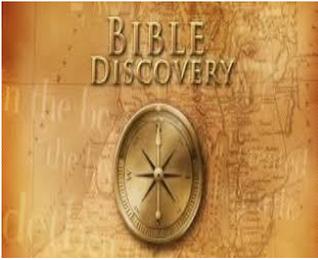


July 5, 2015

Matthew 9:14-17

Can't We All Just Get Along?



Surrounded by a back yard of summer delight, Gary, the Canadian Tire guy, is faced with kids at summer play armed with squirt guns, a back yard with jumping toys, and all manner of “fun” as he asks, “*Can't we all just get along?*” This seems the modern-day mantra for societal norms, especially in challenging those around us about faith. At the heart of everything seems this shear will to have peace at any cost – have every one think the same regardless of personal beliefs – political correctness, enlightened thinking, cooperative, compromising, mass-minded collectivism is the order of the day. While it's difficult to argue with such utopian pursuits closer examination raises the harm, the danger in the midst of such philosophies.

When John the Baptist's disciples came to Jesus they were asking much the same question. They practiced traditional Jewish precepts in worship, fasting, and devotion – why didn't Jesus insist on His disciples behaving the same way? Wouldn't you expect the Son of God, the Messiah, coming from the God who gave them these rules would do that? Can't we all just get along and follow the rules? But at the root of this problem for disciples is over the centuries two things had happened. First, the Pharisees and Sadducees had “interpreted” God's law & instruction to where it had become ritual hardship for those who sought to know God; and secondly they'd lost the heart of the law which was to draw them to the mercy seat of their heavenly Father, seeking forgiveness for their sin and finding grace. Yet for Jesus' disciples, what they experienced at the feet of Jesus was not only His teaching, but his wonderful grace. They could eat, drink and be merry because they were in the midst of the grace of God! They had the wedding feast happening in their lives! The disciples of Jesus had joy, celebration and wonder in their lives because they were with Jesus!

I think in many ways the Church today's become more like disciples of John and the Pharisees than disciples of Jesus. Have we lost the joy, the sense of celebration; have we settled for tightening our belts and plodding along with sad faces, struggling to meet a standard we cannot possibly attain – and uncertain we even know what it is? Doctrines soundly founded on the Word of God have been massaged into denominational norms; secular pursuits. To our south many interpret religious fervour through their concept of government. Some would suggest if you're a born again Christian you have to be a card-carrying Republican - I wonder if Jesus ever wore a dark blue pin-striped suit. And don't even get me started on the “*name it and claim it*” faction of faith. Settled on the capitalistic, wealth and health prosperity environment of North America faith is measured by the value of car, home and career. What happened to the beatitudes of Jesus? What happened to binding up the broken-hearted and setting the captive free? Is it little wonder our religion has little to no impact on the generations which follow us?

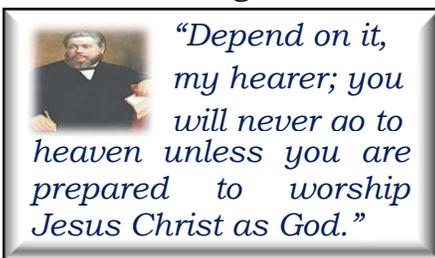
Recently a I heard of a survey asking teenage girls what interested them most. I thought “I know that - *its boys!*” But I was wrong. A majority of girls answered that witchcraft interested them most. And I discovered the fastest growing religion among teenagers is Wicca (*the religion of witchcraft*). The article said that shows like “*Sabrina, the Teenage*

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Witch," "Buffy, the Vampire Slayer," and "Charmed" along with the whole Harry Potter phenomenon where none of them portray witchcraft as it truly is but as innocent, even righteous was what these girls were drawn to. Through the benefit of media, occult is shown as fun and harmless yet powerful and interesting. Then we've the stories of angels who hate us and demons who want to aid us and save us. One thing about television and the movies – no one can accuse them of letting truth stand in the way of a good story.

Because truth can be elusive we fall prey to philosophies such as "true for you but not for me". Sometimes it's easier to coalesce because we lose sight of the truth or we find it difficult to discern so we give in. Especially in this post-modernistic world of political correctness but particularly where we're labeled in areas like faith and morality as rude, even arrogant, if we say someone is wrong. After all doesn't God want us all to love one another, to get along living peacefully together? Somehow we've distorted God's truth, surrendered to science as the modern-day absolute authority, rather than a faith that comes from hearing and following the Word of God.

We must never be swayed by such philosophical interpretations of what's right any more than blindly following scientific interpretations, trying to include every view-point from every person, allowing that all views are true - because when we do, we offer a prescription for failure - such views today range from the everythingism of New Age, to the idea of many gods, to the view that the divine is as much within you as without. Satan propagates that there's no such thing as sin; that tolerance of all views is needed. But the world seeks enlightenment not redemption - and they want it without God. May I suggest this is nothing new? Since original sin entered into man's heart, we've tried to make God in our own image



or worked to negate His presence entirely! Over a hundred years ago Rev'd Dr. Charles Spurgeon called out a warning against such behaviour, "Depend on it, my hearer; you never will go to heaven unless you are prepared to worship Jesus Christ as God."

Can't we all get along? Jesus doesn't leave us with that answer at all. Rather, He tells us as I read the Phillips Bible this morning, "No one cuts up a fine silk scarf to patch old work clothes; you want fabrics that match." That makes sense to me. Jesus continues, "You don't put your wine in cracked bottles". If we would be followers of Christ – His disciples following Him in joy and enjoying His grace we must heed the word of God especially as it describes for us whom we follow.

"Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him." [1 Corinthians 8:6]

Not only do we search God's Word and know whom we follow but we're made aware of the gulf between our Lord and the world in which we're surrounded...

"For the story and message of the cross is sheer absurdity and folly to those who are perishing and on their way to perdition, but to us who are being saved it is the [manifestation of] the power of God." [1 Corinthians 1:18]

Jesus shows us getting along in His church is about an attitudinal function. In order to function as we should, we need to be in relationship with the Father, saved by grace, forgiven of sin by Christ, set free and given eternal life - if we're to get along with others as fellow believers, and then impact our world, show the love of Christ and welcome those others to find grace and joy and love in Jesus. We can't get along with others by living the way of the world; and we can't love everyone on their terms but on God's terms. In his letters to the Ephesians, Romans and Philippians, Paul emphasized our mindset must be the same as Christ. Each of us should

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not only look to our own interests but to the interests of others, we should work to please our neighbour for his good, to build him up remembering Christ didn't come to please Himself but to save us, and that God's the one who grants endurance and encouragement for us to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus.

First and foremost we're called to a spiritual unity which glorifies God. We're no longer to pursue life under the old ways of life but in the newness of fellowship with Jesus. And Christ has welcomed us for the glory of God! I remind you this occurs only when we've the same attitude as Jesus. So it is, our attitude, only as it imitates our Lord Jesus Christ enables us to get along with one another but not at the expense of the gospel. Jesus never backed down from the truth. Jesus never gave in to the Pharisees and the religious pursuits of His. Jesus' belief of getting along was demonstrated through His message. His claim as Messiah was validated through His miracles, His walk and His teachings. The church's claim of being His disciples must be validated through like-minded thinking – with the same attitude as Christ. That compels us to be new wineskins with the new wine of the gospel; that requires us to follow the path that may not be popular but is God's plan which we can follow with confidence since Jesus also knew Satan would interfere with this plan! That's why Jesus Himself prayed to the Father, *"I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one."* [John 17:15] When the early church practiced this kind of attitude, the kind that followed the Saviour, we find that there was tremendous growth in the church. For instance, in the Book of Acts we read, *"Praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."* [Acts 2:47]

Can't we all just get along? Despite the toils of this world, the fellowship of believers strives for harmony through our attitude of Christ, recognizing God uses this harmony to reach the lost. But if we're to have harmony we have to give up selfish pursuits - not the gospel. For us to be in harmony, we have to give up on being first. Leonard Bernstein was once asked which instrument was the most difficult to play. He thought for a moment and then replied, *"The second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm – that's a problem."* We have to remember that Jesus is first and we follow.

Can't we all just get along? Yes we can all just get along but to truly get along we're required to forgive; to truly get along we're required to submit to servant leadership; to truly get along we're required to pursue joyful fellowship; to truly get along we're required to pursue holiness. To truly get along we need to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. That gospel leads us to our attitude toward others. In many ways we determine our attitude knowing that the choices we make will either create or destroy the opportunity to get along in the home, in the community, in the church. Ultimately we must examine ourselves and ask, "are we in Christ?" and "is this what Jesus would do?" This week we've the challenge to seek the gospel rather than mere mindless illumination. We've the challenge to disagree with anything that separates us from the love of Christ; to ensure we never succumb to the folly of the *"true-for-some-but-not-for-others"* line that's simply an intellectual cop-out, a refusal to go beyond superficial acceptance of Christ. Christianity & non-Christian faiths can't all just get along simply because they're all religions. In welcoming others as brothers or sisters in Christ, we must prepare to ask the tuff questions central to our faith such as... "What do you do with Jesus?"

- ✓ ***"Is He Lord having been born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, and on the third day He physically rose again"?***
- ✓ ***Will Jesus come again as He has promised to claim this world for His Father?***
- ✓ ***Will Jesus come as judge and ruler?***

Rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ results in one huge philosophical train wreck. The Gospel was given and is an integral part of all of God's character - it doesn't simply represent a teaching He passed down to us. When we pursue religion, we find it always struggles with balancing positive and negative. Negative usually wins. Our passage from the Gospel of Matthew presses this point. John may have been a great example for us as Baptists - no drinking, no smoking, grasshoppers for lunch. But that makes him more Bin Laden than Jesus! Why are we seeing people leave the church or not coming to church? Maybe we don't understand Jesus correctly.

✚ *Jesus is more rock star than remote monk.*

✚ *Jesus is more rebel than Rabbi.*

✚ *Jesus is more peculiar than popular.*

Jesus calls us to face our faith with excitement and anticipation - to embrace a faith of grace not practice legalistic faith; to break from our old bound traditions and examine the Word of God for what it actually says.

Why are we seeing people leave the church or not coming to church?

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We're to become new in Christ not have Christ fit into our old way of thinking. Just like wine in cracked bottles, it doesn't work to have Christ in our mould of life. If Jesus talked about wineskins today He'd tell us to be filled with excitement. There's joy in knowing Jesus. Christian faith is positive and life-affirming. If it seems boring, find someone who's excited and learn their secret. And He'd tell us to discard what is brittle, outdated broken for the new.

If today you want to make a commitment to living life in Jesus, to have the new wineskins of sincere faith and hope in eternal life with your heavenly Father than turn from the world and its insincere offers of hope and accept Jesus. You'll be so glad you did. Give us a call at 1-519-317-8659 or email us through this website.

Blessings,

Pastor Dave