

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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“RELIGION IS PRIVATE AND PERSONAL”

by Tom Wacaster

It is said, “A man’s religion is personal. It is his business what he does, and privacy ought to prevail.” Thus the sentiments of society. Indeed, religion is personal, and each is to love God with all his “soul, heart, and mind.” And I suppose there might be a sense in which religion IS private and personal, but not in the sense that the above quote is frequently given and/or received. Jesus said, “*Let your light so shine before men*” (Matthew 5:16). Does that sound like our religion ought to be private? A Christian is to be “*an example of the believers*” (1 Timothy 4:12). We are to “*confess [Christ] before men*” (Matthew 10:32). When someone says that religion ought to be “private and personal,” he is in essence saying, “What I do in religion is my business, and no one has the right to judge whether my actions are right or wrong.”

The 1990’s and current decade have seen the widespread acceptance of pluralism—the philosophy that no one is really wrong, and that truth is not absolute: “You believe what you want to believe, I’ll believe what I want to believe, and both of us are right, even if we contradict one another.” Sincerity becomes the standard of determining if one is right or wrong. Knowledge takes a back seat to zeal, and it is full speed ahead to glory land and eternal

bliss, with no consideration given as to whether or not one is traveling the proper path. In fact, some will even go so far as to say that you can believe error, and if you are sincere in that belief, and honest, then it will take you to heaven as surely as if you were following truth. We need to remind ourselves that Jesus said, “*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32).

Interestingly, it is only in religion that we accept this foolish notion that sincerity will somehow negate the force of truth. Should I reach into a medicine cabinet and take poison, sincerely believing it is cough medicine, it will kill me just the same. If I leave Mount Pleasant, Texas and head west on highway 67 thinking that this road will get me to Texarkana, all the sincerity in the world will not get me anywhere close to my destination. Sincerity is necessary, but it is not a talisman that will render whatever we do in religion as acceptable in God’s sight any more than it will make west east, or north south.

The misunderstanding that religion is in some way “private” has resulted in a spiritual “no show.” The only way one’s religion can be of any practical value is if it is applied in an open and honest way to his life. And, once you make the application, and live in harmony with your convictions, you imply by your actions that this is the

correct course to take. Noah was likely persecuted for his righteousness. In building the ark he “*condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith*” (Hebrews 11:7). His message, and his involvement in building that ark said to the world around him, “You are in disobedience to God, and you will be punished.” If a man lays claim to religion, but holds that religion to himself, he has done the world an injustice; for he has said, in short, that his religion is not worth living and proclaiming. Religion is to be a light to those about us. When you couple sincerity with truth, you have an equation worth shouting from the rooftops.

A recent poll suggests that better than 70% of Americans believe in God and lay claim to some church affiliation. That same poll reveals that less than 40% of that same group says that their religion has made any difference in their life. This is because they have adapted this notion that your religion is private and personal and you ought not to express your convictions either in word or in deed. Hence, there has been a growing acceptance of homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, drug use, gambling, and such sinfulness for no other reason than the fact that America’s religion has become personal and private. While ungodliness has come out of the closet, the moral majority [if there indeed be a moral majority] has slipped silently and cowardly into the closet. The humanists, atheists,

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and profligates are having a heyday, and we, as a nation, are the worse for it.

Now, before we criticize others, let us take a close look at ourselves. The church, in my estimation, is going through some of the roughest seas she has ever sailed. Liberalism is rampant. Whole congregations are being swept into apostasy. And much of that is due to members who have swallowed the idea that you ought not be judgmental. We have, in many places, adapted a "wait and see" attitude. And while we "wait" we "see" the Lord's church ravaged and plundered by the wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:29). Twenty years of indifference toward error has produced the sad predicament in which we now find ourselves. And much of this is due to the prevailing attitude that what we do in religion is private and personal.

May God help us to remain loyal to Him. Let us uphold the Gospel, in tongue and in deed. Let us tell others of the soul-saving message within the pages of holy writ, and let us never, never, **never** buy into the idea that our religion is nothing more than private and personal.

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EXACT OBEDIENCE

by Marvin Rickett

How does one prove that he loves the heavenly Father? The same way Jesus did. Jesus said, "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do" (John 14:31). A later version says, "...I do exactly what the Father has commanded me." The original word is *kathos*, meaning "just as." The way Jesus proved that He loved the heavenly Father was His careful and precise obedience; He did exactly what the Father commanded. He put His disciples to the same test when He said to them, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments*" and, "*If a man love me, he will keep my words*" (John 14:15, 23). This is a test of just who His disciples are today and who it is that truly loves God.

A person who is concerned with doing exactly what the Bible says—only and all of what the Bible says—is often labeled a "legalist." But this is not what the Bible says a legalist is. A legalist is one who "*trusts in himself, that he is righteous*" (Luke 18:9). And it is not trusting in self to try to do all of God's commandments. Rather, it is manifestly trusting in God,

believing that His commandments are righteousness (Psalm 119:172).

One problem that modern religions have is believing they can APPROXIMATE the Lord's commandments and still be acceptable to Him. We have folks "accepting Jesus" by saying the sinner's prayer. We have religious groups sprinkling babies and calling it baptism. We hear people making music on mechanical instruments and alleging that they are praising God. Some partake of the Lord's Supper twice a year or quarterly and assert that they are obeying the Lord's command. This reminds one of King Saul who said, "*I have performed the commandment of the Lord!*" when he had only approximated the "performance." He had expressly disobeyed some items (1 Samuel 15:13ff).

The astonishing thing is, many of those who only approximate obeying the commandments of the Lord proclaim long and loud their love for the Lord. They often express disdain for those who demand a "thus saith the Lord" for their religion. They believe that it is somehow superior for them to "improve" upon the simple New Testament pattern.

The plea for restoring New Testament Christianity depends heavily on complete obedience to the commands of the New Testament. This is the only way the church of Jesus Christ with its doctrine and practices can be restored.

Like Jesus said, one's sincere and complete submission to God in full obedience to His commandments is the best proof that one loves the heavenly Father.

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POPULAR ASSOCIATIONS WITH RELIGION

by Lee Moses

In the late eighth century B.C., the king of Assyria sent military forces against Jerusalem, Judah's capitol city and religious center (2 Kings 18:7). Assyria was the dominant world power, and had already overthrown the northern kingdom of Israel, taking those rebellious kinsmen of Judah into captivity (17:6-23). An officer called Rabshakeh, serving as spokesman for the Assyrian forces, approached Jerusalem's city walls to threaten Hezekiah king of Judah, and to demand his surrender and submission. Rabshakeh claimed that Judah had no substance on which to base their confidence (18:19). He even claimed that the Lord would not prove helpful to Judah in this circumstance. To prove his point, Rabshakeh asked, "But if ye say unto me, We trust in the LORD our God: is not that he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?" (v. 22).

Rabshakeh displayed a misunderstanding of God in his supposedly rhetorical question. He believed that because these various places and instruments of worship had been removed, the Lord would not bless Judah. However, God had commanded that the people were to worship in a specific place and in a specific manner:

Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you;

your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD. . . . Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee (Deuteronomy 12:11,13-14).

Rabshakeh displayed a gross misperception of God and of religion. There were associations that he believed **had** to be included for religion to be complete. Yet for religion to be God's religion, those associations had to be removed.

The popular associations with religion that exist today may not be the same as they were in Rabshakeh's day. But there are new and multiplied popular associations with religion. As was the case with Rabshakeh, when these popular associations with religion are removed, many **feel** that they are not worshiping God.

There are many who feel that religion is incomplete without manmade additions to music in worship. Most people have come to expect a musical extravaganza in worship, replete with mechanical instruments, choirs, soloists, and such like. If these "essential elements" are not present in worship, people will assume that the worship must be inferior. Yet God gave specific

instructions regarding music in worship:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Colossians 3:16).

From these and other passages, one can see that the music in worship is to be vocal (particularly "singing"), spiritually instructive, and interactive. When a church does not add to this, they do what is pleasing to God. When a church sees any additions or changes present and removes them, they do what is pleasing to God.

Many believe that a church must have one man "in charge," who is to be called "The Pastor." They are also convinced that a church must be part of a larger organization that regulates and oversees the church. Yet a plurality of elders is to be installed "in every church" where there are qualified men (Acts 14:23; cf. Titus 1:5-9). It is this group of men who collectively serve as shepherds, or pastors (1 Peter 5:1-4). It is they, not a larger organization, who have been given the charge to oversee the church (Acts 20:28; cf. v. 17). Deacons are to serve under the eldership (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13). When a church ensures that they are following this Scriptural pattern of organization and no other, they do what is pleasing to God.

Most people want their church to observe special holydays, or holidays, such as Easter and Christmas. Yet such things are not part of the Christian religion, because they are not part of the New Testament. Special days had been part of the Old Testament; but in light of Christ's abolition of the Old Testament, the Colossian church was commanded, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17). The New Testament was now the only standard by which the Colossian church, or any church, could be judged (John 12:48; Colossians 3:17). The churches of Galatia were falling into apostasy; as Paul by inspiration laments, "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Galatians 4:10-11). God instructs particular acts of worship to be offered on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2), but He does not attach special significance to any particular day of the year. When a church likewise refuses to attach special religious significance to any particular day of the year, they do what is pleasing to God.

Rabshakeh thought that King Hezekiah would bring God's displeasure upon Judah because Hezekiah had removed what some thought to be essential elements of religion. But contrary to this opinion, Hezekiah "did that which was right in the sight of the LORD" (2 Kings 18:3). And the Lord showed His favor on

Hezekiah and displeasure with Assyria when His angel destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers that were preparing to attack Judah (19:35). Although some may feel that their associations with religion must be included for religion to be effective; the Lord will show His favor on you if you choose to disregard the popular associations with religion, and choose instead to please God (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

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GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP

- COLOSSIANS 3:17

1. **LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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