

Keep God First

This week's essay prompted this offering. It is quite apparent that many get caught up in the fervor of patriotism and totally disregard the foundations on which we were built. You may be as tired as I am of hearing "we are losing our democracy." Well, this lie has been perpetuated by the liberals for so long, you rarely hear someone acknowledge we are a Constitutional Republic, a land of laws and elected officials. We are not mob ruled...well at least not completely yet.

This type of focus is also prevalent in the church. Members can get so involved in the structure or hierarchy they forget Who is the Foundation. People throw the label of "Christian" more than democracy. So many profess to "be" a Christian but are they really? If you check most dictionary definitions of the term "Christian," you will find it means, "one who professes belief in the teachings of Christ." (Merriam-Webster).

However, the Cambridge Dictionary has a more definitive meaning attached to the term, Christian. They define it as: noun- "someone who *believes in and follows the teachings of Jesus Christ.*" We all know belief is not enough.

James 2:17-20- “In the same way also, faith, if it does not have works, is dead, by itself. But someone is going to say, “You have faith, and I have works.” *My answer is:* You prove your faith to me through your works, and I will prove my faith to you through my works. Do you believe that God is one? You do well to believe this. Even the demons believe—and tremble in fear. But are you willing to understand, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?”

Even to make the definition stronger, they should add “follows and does the teachings of Jesus Christ.”

James 1:22-25- “Then be doers of the Word, and not only hearers, deceiving your own selves Because if anyone is a hearer of *the* Word and not a doer, this one is like a man considering his natural face in a mirror Who, after looking at himself, went away and immediately forgot what he was like. But the one who has looked into *the* perfect law of freedom, and has continued in *it*, this one himself has not become a forgetful hearer, but is a doer of *the* work. This one shall be blessed in his actions.”

James 1:16- “Do not deceive yourselves, my beloved brethren.”

We must maintain a constant concentration on our love of God and His will for our lives above all else. There must be in us a very clear focus on what is important and what is not.

Matthew 6:33-34- “But *as for* you, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow shall take care of the *things* of itself. Sufficient for the day *is* the evil of that *day*.”

God's Word gives us what is important, but Satan is always standing in the ready to distract us to lose our attention. Distraction produces nothing good toward the Kingdom and hinders our spiritual growth. Fear, trials and our own complacency are all enough to sidetrack us individually. More often than not, all three influences occur simultaneously.

Growing in our faith enables us to discern what is important and what is not, giving us the insight we need to deal with the wiles of the devil.

Ephesians 6:10-12- “Finally, my brethren, be strong in *the* Lord, and in the might of His strength. Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil Because we are not wrestling

against flesh and blood, but against principalities *and* against powers, against the world rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual *power* of wickedness in high *places*.”

Our faith is increased from loving God *first* and immersing ourselves in His Word. It is not something that merely happens because you read God’s Word. It comes because we analyze what we read, compare it to life and our circumstances and *live it*.

We have discussed the term “*churchianity*” in previous studies and it is an actual word found in dictionaries. Most of the sources I checked for definitions are quite similar if not identical. The Free Dictionary stated it best as; “Any practices of Christianity that place a larger emphasis on the habits of church life or the institutional traditions of the church than on theology and spiritual teachings of Jesus; the quality of being too church-focused.”

Romans 1:22-25- “While professing themselves to be *the* wise ones, they became fools And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into *the* likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed creatures, and

creeping things. For this cause, God also abandoned them to uncleanness through the lusts of their hearts, to disgrace their own bodies between themselves, Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie; and they worshiped and served the created thing more than the One Who is Creator, Who is blessed into the ages. Amen.”

Placing more of our attention on the church or group brings up the subject of *idolatry* much like we read in the essay. Because of the critical importance to our walk and relationship with God, we need to constantly refine our understanding of it so we can avoid any pitfalls the enemy would put in between us and God.

Exodus 20:3-6- “You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourselves any graven image, or any likeness of *anything* that *is* in the heavens above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them, for I, the LORD your God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, But showing mercy to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

Certainly, the church, members and functions are important, but they must never take precedence over keeping God first. Collectively we make up the Body of Christ. We all have our individual gifts and functions. Coming together in fellowship enhances our spiritual growth. Iron sharpens iron... (Proverbs 27:17)

Romans 12:4-6- “For even as we have many members in one body, but all members do not have the same function; Likewise, we, being many, are one body in Christ, and each one members of one another. But each one has different gifts according to the grace that is given to us—whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the measure of faith;”

1 Corinthians 12:11-14- “But the one and the same Spirit is operating in all these things, dividing separately to each one as *God* Himself desires. For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the one body, though many, are one body; so also *is* Christ. For indeed, by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether

bondmen or free—and we were all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body of *Christ* is not one member, but many.”

Ephesians 4:11-12- “And He gave some as apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers For the perfecting of the saints, for *the* work of *the* ministry, for *the* edifying of the body of Christ;”

We must never allow our roles or functions within the Body of Christ to become more important than Christ Himself. It is His Body we are a part of. Humanity is often driven by ego, blind self-deception, or plain ignorance.

Within the church it is usually caused by a poor relationship with God, a lack of knowledge in His Word, or more often, failure to compare oneself with God’s standards. We tend to “measure up” using other people’s religion or outward image as a standard for comparison.

Ephesians 4:13-16- “Until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto *the* measure of *the* stature of the fullness of Christ; So that we no longer be children, tossed and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men in *cunning* craftiness, with a view to the systematizing of the error; But speaking the truth in love, may in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, *even*

Christ From Whom all the body, fitly framed and compacted together by *that* which every joint supplies, according to *its* inner working in *the* measure of each individual part, is making the increase of the body unto *the* edifying of itself in love.”

This is incredibly significant because the character of every life is determined by the devotion that rules it. We are obligated and even still, commanded to love God first.

Matthew 22:37-38- “And Jesus said to him,” ‘You shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is *the* first and greatest commandment;”

Letting a church become our center or any human is simply idolatry. We obey God and not men.

Acts 5:29- “But Peter and the apostles answered and said, “We are obligated to obey God rather than men.”

Seeking God and knowing Him more is foundational for the church and Body of Christ to grow spiritually. Human pride often hinders one in seeking God.

Psalm 10:4- “Through the pride of his countenance the wicked will not seek God; in all his thoughts there is no place for God.”

There used to be a saying that the biggest hypocrites sit in the first two rows in church. So many desire to be seen and noticed for the religious achievements they fail to realize that all glory goes to God.

1 Corinthians 10:31- “Therefore, whether you eat, or you drink, or you do anything, do all things to the glory of God.”

Matthew 23:5-6- “And they do all their works to be seen by men. They make broad their phylacteries and enlarge the borders of their garments; And they love the first place at the suppers, and the chief seats in the synagogues,”

Caution is urged to those who have this mindset. If you seek God's attention in this manner you just may get it.

Romans 1:17-23- “For therein *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith unto faith, according as it is written: “The just shall live by faith.” Indeed, *the* wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest among them, for God has manifested *it* to them; For the invisible things of Him are perceived from *the* creation of *the* world, being understood by the things that were made—both His eternal power and Godhead—so that they are without excuse; Because when they knew God, they glorified *Him* not as God, neither were thankful; but they became vain in their own reasonings, and their foolish hearts were darkened. While professing themselves to be *the* wise ones, they became fools And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into *the* likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed creatures, and creeping things.”

Proverbs 16:25- “There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death.”

Many Christians struggle with developing this spiritual insight by keeping one foot in the world and the other on God's path. They fail to see things with spiritual insight and focus only on physical things or circumstances. Getting caught up in "church things" may lead some to believe they are spiritual and serving God. They can read and understand God's Word but continue in the ways of the world. Remember, we have been called out from among them.

2 Corinthians 6:14-17- "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and lawlessness *have* in common? And what fellowship *does* light *have* with darkness? And what union *does* Christ *have* with Belial? Or what part *does* a believer *have* with an unbeliever? And what agreement *is there between* a temple of God and idols? For you are a temple of *the* living God, exactly as God said: "I will dwell in them and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from the midst of them and be separate," says *the* Lord, "and touch not *the* unclean, and I will receive you;"

Our spiritual insight can become blurred or distorted by what we see and hear physically. God has given us spiritual sight through the power of His Holy Spirit. Wisdom, understanding, and discernment are added to our growth.

Why is it so important to please God? Aside from being commanded to love God first, Jesus set the example for us to follow.

Matthew 8:29- “And He Who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone because I always do the things that please Him.” Jesus did this because nothing was more important to Him than His relationship with His Father and fulfilling His mission on Earth. We too must walk in the footsteps of Christ. Drawing closer to Him will prepare us for what lies ahead.

2 Timothy 3:1-7- “Know this also, that in *the* last days perilous times shall come; For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, braggarts, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, savage, despisers of those who are good, Betrayers, reckless, egotistical, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; Having an outward appearance of godliness, but denying the power of *true* godliness. But *as for you*, turn away from *all* these. For from *men such as* these come those who are worming their way into houses, and are

gaining control over empty-headed *gullible* women given over to *various* sins, *being* driven by all kinds of lust. *They are* always learning but *are* never able to come to *the* knowledge of *the* truth.”

Loving and developing our relationship with God should always take precedence over any distractions from the world or even in the church. When we keep God first in all that we are and all that we do, the world becomes a little further in the rear-view mirror as we leave its influences behind.

1 John 2:15-18- “Do not love the world, nor the things *that are* in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him Because everything that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pretentious pride of physical life—is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world and its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God abides forever. Little children, it is *the* last time; and just as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have risen up, by which we know that it is *the* last time.”

The church and fellowship are integral parts of our journey towards God’s Kingdom. The parts and journey are never greater than the One Who called

us. We must embrace with determination to that first part of the Great Commandment to love God with all we are and everything in us. Amen.

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