

Christmas:

Truth, Opinion, Tradition, and Authority Galatians 4:8-11 Romans 14:5-7

It might sound strange to some of you, but I actually like things simple. If only life were simple. It's not! People complicate things. Even well intending people can mangle the truth well beyond recognition.

The Christmas day-keeping-thing is one of the most people-like people complications. Trying to sort it out is quite challenging, but the effort is well worth while. On the journey we discover many things that profoundly instruct us about the nature of Christianity and the purposes of God.

The Challenge

- Effective Christianity requires maturity and the grown up thinking that accompanies it (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:11-14; Eph. 4:14-15).
- It is the "sum" of God's word that is the truth (Ps. 119:160).
- Life is constantly hurling complicated people problems our way, only those wise in the word emerge victorious.

God's Purpose

- John 3:17 reveals that salvation is more God's desire than judgment.
- Yet, Matthew 5:17-19 shows that God's purpose is accomplished only through a strict application of His truth.
- Neither traditions (Mk. 7:1-13), nor mere good intentions (Acts 9:1-2; Rom. 10:1-2), can accomplish God's purpose.

Our Texts and our Christmas, day-keeping problem

- Galatians 4:8-11 strongly condemns binding religious days on Christians that are not bound by the New Covenant (cf. Gal. 1:6-10).
- Romans 14:5-7, however, strongly supports the right of Christians to observe days not required by the New Covenant (note esp. Rom. 14:13).
- What are we to do?
 - o We can choose which passage we like best and forget about the other, a much easier course to follow—but dead wrong.
 - o Or we can put together all the verses that bear on the question of day keeping and then make a biblical decision, a more difficult path to follow—but absolutely the only acceptable way to go.

More things for the holiday mix

- While Romans 14 is specifically dealing with those weak in faith being able to observe days as matters of private conviction, Paul, hardly a weak Christian, commonly observed matters of Jewish tradition even when that

observance would likely be misinterpreted by most who saw it (Acts 21:17-26; cf. I Cor. 9:20; Acts 18:18; Num. 6:13-21; Acts 13:5, 14).

- The Old covenant is no longer in effect (Heb. 8:5; 10:1).
- In Christianity, all must be done in the name of the Lord (Col. 3:17).
- Binding the traditions of men must never be chosen over the instruction of God's word (Matt. 15:7-9; Mk. 7:9, 13).
- Obedience has always been the only way to go (I Sam. 15:20-24).
- All things that are not in themselves sinful are lawful, even if not expedient (I Cor. 6:12; 10:23; cf. Mk. 7:14-15; Rom. 14:13-16).
- The truth frees (Jn. 8:32).
- Jesus is openly associated at the temple with the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah), a feast not prescribed in the Old Covenant, dating from 167 B.C. in the Inter-testament Period (Jn. 10:22).
- At anytime we want to, we can elect to praise God for any good thing He has done (Phil. 4:8; Matt. 11:25; Lk. 19:37; Acts 3:8).

The sum of the truth

- We should and must strongly condemn any attempt to bind as a Christian necessity any day or practice that the New Covenant does not so bind.
- We should and must defend that an individual can exercise a personal judgment or scruple regarding a variety of private religious choices.
- For the sake of the Gospel, there will be times when an individual might accommodate himself to culture in order to remove unnecessary roadblocks to the Gospel. Sometimes potential misunderstandings are not nearly as significant as having an audience for saving a soul.
- We must not only consider the actions of a person, but the intent of the heart before we judge. At times, that is the primary key in determining the rightness or wrongness of a particular activity.
- Individual choices must not be given the status of church policy. Opinion and judgment must not be made law for the church universal
- Context, context, context, is the rule in biblical interpretation! Applying a verse beyond its context is a dishonest. Failing to stand for the meaning of a text in its context is cowardice.

As we find ourselves in December, God would have us drink deep from the well of biblical truth, as at all other times, and conduct ourselves in the way that would best serve His purpose. Mere traditions, whether they are ours or others, should not govern what we do and don't do. The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth must guide our feet.

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