



Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

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Some Reflections on Religion

By

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Due to the chaotic condition in the world today, it is possible to hear or read statements that either attempt to exonerate religion or make attacks upon religious ideologies.

The world situation will not permit us to totally ignore the conflict. If you are religious, how do you justify your convictions? If you are irreligious, how do you justify your nonreligious attitudes and actions? Is it possible to justify all religions? If we condemn some and justify others, what is the basis of our justification or condemnation?

Defining Religion

It should be obvious to all that there needs to be a working definition of what we mean by religion if we are to have any meaningful reflection on the subject. I have used the following definition in the Christian Evidences Class that is conducted at the school, and I offer it here as a starting point: "Religion is the recognition by man that he is not the greatest (ultimate) being (force) in the universe and that he (man) must bring himself into harmony with that being or force." I have defined

"Christianity as the religion of Jesus Christ as taught in the Bible."

With this definition of religion, I cite the summary definition given by Andrew Kerr Rule, in "Religion, Religious," Baker's Dictionary of Theology, 442: "definitive characteristics of religion, the acknowledgment of a higher, unseen power; an attitude of reverent dependence on that power in the conduct of life; and special actions, e.g., rites, prayers, acts of mercy etc., as peculiar expressions, and means of cultivation, of the religious attitude."

Critical Reflections

This in no way justifies any and all religions. It does however demand of us an evaluation of a given religion.

Most religious movements have an evolutionary development, and given time they will receive acceptance by the masses. For example, if I were to claim that I have the sole authority under Jesus Christ to grant forgiveness to any and all people, I would be considered a religious fanatic, and rightly so. However, given time and a

following coupled with physical and mental coercion, some may consider me to be the sole representative of Jesus Christ on earth.

Again, I may claim that Jesus Christ has given me some special new revelations and I alone am able to decipher this information, and I am reorganizing the church into a later day religious movement. At first I may be considered foolish, and rightly so, but given time and a following, many may accept me as a prophet and the originator of a new religious movement and the masses classify this as a legitimate religion.

Some in the world seem to be blaming "religion" on the cause of many of the major problems in our world, and they are not far afield in their analysis. However, to justify such an accusation, there must be some basis of evaluating and justifying the charge. What is it to be a "religious fanatic"? Upon what basis should we accept or reject religious beliefs or actions?

Consider! Since a large number of people die in hospitals, does this justify the

condemnation of all hospitals? Again, since some physicians have been charged with improper conduct that has led to great harm to their patients, does this justify a blanket condemnation of the medical profession? In like manner, does the religious abuse of a religious leader justify a blanket condemnation of all religious teaching and practices?

With these reflections in mind, it should remind all serious thinking people that we should desire what is true and reject what is false in the field of both medicine and religion. However, this does not solve the problem. We must have a proper basis for evaluating a given subject before we can properly judge its merit or fault.

We should recognize that in the field of medical science that the scientists are continually developing new and better means of treating our physical problems. Things judged to be beneficial in the past are later found to be harmful. Treatments practiced today may have to be removed later when it is discovered that these may actually be harmful to us.

This line of reflection is true in most human endeavors. However, it is often lacking in the field of religious reflection. When a person raises an objection to a given religious idea or practice, that person raising the objection is often labeled as dogmatic, legalistic, prejudice, or unloving. Are the charges true? Are the charges not true? Upon what basis will you pass judgment?

In our country, we are given the political freedom to

practice religion with the greatest of governmental freedoms. Our freedoms are unheard of in many other countries. The freedoms we have to practice religion did not come without a cost. With the "marriage" of state and religion comes the potential for many harmful effects. We thank God for our freedom of religion.

In our Bible, we read of the corruption and abuse of religious practices. Cain killed his brother Abel over religious differences (Gen. 4). Jeroboam corrupted the revealed religion of God to Israel of old that resulted in much blood shed and sorrow (1 Kings 12, 2 Kings 17). The true prophets to Israel called upon the nation to return to their God in faithful obedience, but they rejected the overtures of mercy to their sorrow and shame. (Jer. 5:1, 30-31; 6:16-19).

God, in His providential government, often directed nations to remove a nation that had reached the point of degradation that warranted Heaven's judgment. He used Israel to remove the people of Canaan, not because of Israel's goodness, but because of the Canaanite's corruption (Deut. 9:1-6). He in turn used the Babylonian nation to remove the wicked nation of Judah. A careful study of the books of Habakkuk and Daniel will sustain this point. In the words of the Book of Daniel, we learn that "The Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will." (Dan. 4:17, 25 ASV). In the words of the prophet Isaiah we learn that God will also deal with the

Babylonian nation for her corruption and rebellion. (Isa. 13).

NOTE! In the days of inspired prophets, God often gave specific directives in ordering the rise and fall of nations as stated above. However, with the completion of the Bible, there are no modern day prophets to provide God's day by day government of the affairs of the world. Christ is in control of all things from the throne of God (Matt. 28:18-20), and He sent the Holy Spirit to guide the chosen Apostles into all religious truth (John 14:26; 16:13).

Any person claiming special directives apart from, and contrary to, the teaching of the New Testament misunderstand the will of God. Since the Apostles were supernaturally guided into all truth in writing the Bible, and since the Bible is complete (1 Cor. 13:10), then all religious claims should be evaluated by the Bible.

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TRAINING PREACHERS SINCE 1969

The Old Testament is no longer binding on humanity. It was completed and replaced by the coming of the Christ and the completing of the New Testament (Col. 2:14; 2 Cor. 3:6-18).

In the Old Testament era, there were inspired individuals to provide essential information for the Jewish Religious-State to function under direct Divine instructions. However, today, under Christ, there is not a uniting of the Civil and Religious Systems, each is separate.

In the Parables, Jesus shows this truth, and it is important for all to recognize it. The religious society is not authorized to militarily uproot those in religious error. That will be done in the final judgment by an impartial, all powerful, benevolent and just God.

Jesus spoke a parable of the tares that provides His directives in these matters. In providing the parable His hearers did not properly understand its meaning and asked Him to explain it to them. The original parable is reads as follows: "Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this.

The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matt.13:24-30 KJV).

When they asked the interpretation, Jesus answered as follows: "Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Mat. 13:36-43 KJV).

Today, in the world there is both good and bad, religious and otherwise. We have moral principles to govern our thoughts

and actions and will be held accountable for them. However we do not have Divine authority to use physical force to remove a religion that is not in harmony with the teaching of the Bible.

The Civil State is authorized to wield the sword against evil doers (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). Christians are to comply with the mandates of the civil state wherein they reside as long as the mandates of the state do not keep one from obeying God (Acts 5:29).

The God of heaven calls upon all to find religious truth, to love that truth and to obey that truth (John 8: 31-32; 2 Thess. 2:9-12; 1 Thess. 5:21-22).

Individuals should be honored for making great strides in medical science. Society holds in high esteem those who find difficulties that bring physical harm to the body and call upon those responsible to make the necessary corrections. We are blessed when medical science finds and applies the truth.

However, in a society of religious freedom many are not so eager to pursue the truth. Some do not want to come to the truth because they would have to amend their ways (John 3:19-21).

There are religious perversions (Gal. 1:6-12). Only by the love of the truth, the knowledge of the truth, and application of the truth can we avoid religious fanaticism (2 Cor. 10:12, 18, 4-5; 2 John 9-11). Let us renew our determination to study to show ourselves approved and handle properly the sacred truth of the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15).

Gene Burgett Report

The 2005-2006 school year is now behind us. We graduated three very fine men in May. Two of these graduates are already working with local congregations. I sometimes receive questions regarding the employment prospects of our graduates. Both of these men were already slated to work with local churches before they even graduated. Our third graduate came to us directly out of high school and has decided to continue his studies at Freed-Hardeman University. The point is, if a man wants to preach, there are plenty of opportunities for men who have prepared themselves for the work.

It is sometimes difficult to predict what enrollment will be from year to year, but if everyone who has made known their intention to attend in the fall actually does so, our numbers should be even higher in the coming school year. I strongly urge anyone that has been contemplating attending the Florida School of Preaching to contact me or the school office to learn the requirements and obtain the necessary paper work.

Traditionally, I spend several weeks during the summer visiting churches outside the state of Florida. With no classes in the summer longer trips are made easier as there is no need to return to teach classes during the week. I look forward to visiting several congregations

in the state of Alabama.

Something I have not addressed very often in my report is the kindness a number of individuals have shown by remembering the Florida School of Preaching in their wills. A couple of times over the past year the school has been blessed by the generosity of kind Christian people who named the Florida School of Preaching a beneficiary of their estate upon their passing. Our budget is always extremely tight and these funds were crucial to providing for the operation of the school. Wisdom and good stewardship dictates that each of us make plans for how the wealth God has blessed us with in this life will be used after we are gone. Even in passing from this life one can play a part in the spreading of the gospel. If any of my readers have any questions about what is involved in remembering the Florida School of Preaching in their estates, please contact the school office for details.

I still have room in my summer schedule and look forward to hearing from any who would like to learn more about the Florida School of Preaching.

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