

What's It All About? It's All About Relationships

Scripture Reading:

Unless the LORD builds^y the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches^z over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. (Psalm 127:1, NIV)

Subject Sentence:

If Christianity is about anything, it is about Relationships.

Relationships with self,

Relationship with the physical world around us

Relationships with our fellow man

And most importantly our relationship with our God.

Should Christians fail to understand that Christianity is a religion of relationships, they subject themselves idolatry.

Introduction:

I've been asked by members of the congregation to discuss "sin", "holiness," "righteousness," "faithful living", "obedience," "praise", "worship", "Lordship", "Servant hood", and Lord willing we will get there. But allow me this opportunity to speak to you on "relationship".

- I) **Declining Numbers in Mainstream Churches** are causing congregations from nearly every religious group to **evaluate their place** in a post modern world.
 - A) All across this nation, mainstream churches are **trying to understand and bring an end to declining numbers** within their respective denominations.
 - B) The **churches of Christ are no different:**
 - 1) Many of our congregations are asking themselves **if they are relevant.**
 - 2) Are we having an **identity crisis?**
 - 3) **What** do we believe?
 - 4) **Where** are we going?
 - 5) **How** are we going to get there?
- II) The Barna Group's survey entitled **Barna's Annual Tracking Study Shows Americans Stay Spiritually Active, But Biblical Views Wane** (May 21, 2007) has some things for us to consider:
 - A) *"It is hard to miss Americans' comfort with and interest in spirituality. Most adults say that their religious faith is very important in their life. Two-thirds of the nation's adult population firmly embraces the idea that their most important*

*purpose is to love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength. However, a deeper look at people's full array of spiritual beliefs and behavior calls into question the sincerity of their commitment."*¹

- B) Barna continues by saying, *"The Barna study, which began exploring the nation's religious behavior and beliefs in 1984, shows that commitment to orthodox biblical perspectives is slipping in a number of areas."*²
- C) Barna continued, *"The study also examined people's spiritual identity. For instance, 83% of Americans identified as Christians, yet only 49% of these individuals described themselves as absolutely committed to Christianity."*³
- D) Continuing, *"David Kinnaman, who directed the study, indicated that "most Americans do not have strong and clear beliefs, largely because they do not possess a coherent biblical worldview. That is, they lack a consistent and holistic understanding of their faith....Millions feel personally committed to God, but they are renegotiating the definition of that deity."*
- E) Kinnaman continued saying, *"In fact, one reason why beliefs fluctuate is that most Americans' hold few convictions about their faith. For instance, even among those who disagree with orthodox views, many do so while hedging their bets. Most Americans have one foot in the biblical camp, and one foot outside it. They say they are committed, but to what? They are spiritually active, but to what end? The spiritual profile of American Christianity is not unlike a lukewarm church that the Bible warns about."*⁴
- F) Further, *"Kinnaman, the president of the research firm, suggested that the shift away from biblical perspectives is like moving the foundation of a building. "We are likely to see more significant alterations to the spiritual landscape, since what a person believes dictates a great deal about their behavior and allegiance. To give purpose to the spiritual lifestyle of Americans, there are few tasks more important than helping Americans develop a biblical view of life. Otherwise, millions of people, including many within the youngest generations, will conclude the Christian faith does not represent deep, consistent truths about the spiritual and natural world."*⁵

III) With all that is going on (or not going on) in our churches today, **many devoted Christians have become passionate about what it will take to "turn us around"** towards more spiritual and numerical growth:

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- A) We are questioning what changes to make and what things to keep to help make the church strong again:
- 1) Should we be seeker sensitive, or not?
 - 2) Should we do everything the way we used to do it, or make changes?
 - 3) Should we sing the old or the new songs?
 - 4) Should we preach more doctrine, rules, etc.?
 - 5) Should we have more programs or not?
 - 6) Should we change our name or not?
 - 7) Add an instrument or not?
 - 8) Change the women's role or not?
 - 9) Or any number of other things!
- B) The church has to understand that issue oriented discussions only separate and tear down the church.
- 1) Identifying Jesus as Lord...
 - 2) Identifying Jesus' word as his sovereign will...
 - 3) Identifying ourselves as his servants...
 - 4) Will go a long way to preserving and growing a dynamic church...
 - 5) Jesus said, "he would build his church"...
 - 6) We are arrogant and practice idolatry if we think anything different.
- C) What we are trying to do is to define and make a perfect church!:
- 1) But, we will never be a perfect church...
 - 2) ...except for our perfect Savior – Jesus Christ.
 - 3) More than anything else, it will be Jesus that saves his church!
 - (a) And we need to stop "forcing" the issues of what we think will grow a church...
 - (b) ...More than anything else, we need to understand that Jesus Christ, and a relationship with him alone will lead and save the church.
 - (c) The true relevance of the church is tied up in her relationship with her Savior Jesus Christ!
 - (d) When the church places Jesus as it's center and foundation the church will be united and will experience spiritual and numerical growth.
 - (e) Jesus said he would build his church (**Matthew 16:18**).
 - (f) Our religion and our church must be built upon the solid relationship of Jesus Christ.

Body:

- l) Some people I have personally known to have claimed that they had it all right in their lives:
- A) Jan:

- 1) Jan's religion was built upon **her own interpretation** of God's word.
 - 2) If she did not like it, she would just change it or delete it from memory.
 - 3) She was a professed and devoted member of the churches of Christ.
 - 4) **"I know the Bible says that, but..."**
 - 5) She was right and everyone else was wrong.
- B) Barbara:
- 1) Barbara was another sister in Christ who thought she was right and everyone else was wrong.
 - 2) Barbara stated that she "could not think of anything she had ever done in life that was bad enough to send her to hell."
 - 3) Barbara's faith was built upon "**her own good works**."
 - 4) She did not need Jesus!
- C) **What of us?:**
- 1) What of our faith?
 - 2) What do we subtly say about ourselves and our faith?
 - 3) In a day and age when we plainly and clearly see the church struggling to hold on...:
 - (a) it becomes increasingly easy (and it even seems of necessity) to toss out for conversation what it is that the church needs to help it grow again!
 - (b) Conversation may center around many and varied issues:
 - (i) Keeping the legal code ("**The Code Keepers**")
 - (ii) Developing a better ritual ("**Dazed and Amazed**")
 - (iii) Doing more works ("**Pull you self up by your own boot straps**")
 - (iv) Being better stewards ("**Chrome Polishers**")
 - (v) Or the all time favorite everyone needs to be just like me ("**Wax Eloquently**")
 - (c) But what concerns me is that **the single most important issue is often times missing** in our conversation – **a relationship with Jesus Christ...**
- II) **Consider *The Lives of The People Who Thought They Had Their Religion Right – But God Said Something Different*** (The Scripture is [replete](#) with such examples):
- A) **The People Who Primarily Saw Religion as Law – But God Said Relationship ([Matthew 12:1-14](#)):**
- 1) The Law was put into place to guide the lives of men's relationship with God, with men who have been created in God's image, and with God's creation:
 - (a) The Law was put into place to serve mankind in teaching men to love, honor, service, etc.
 - (b) But the religious leaders took the Law that was meant:
 - (i) to teach respect, honor and love for God

- (ii) To teach respect, honor and love for God's creation...
- (iii) ...and they unwittingly used it to accomplish the very opposite!
- (c) What of us, we must be careful!
 - (i) This happened because these religious leaders saw the Law...
 - (ii) But they had not come to see the Lord of the Law...
 - (iii) Jesus said to them, ***"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."*** (John 5:39-40, NIV).
- 2) The **letter kills, the Spirit gives life** (2 Corinthians 3:5-6, NIV)
- 3) Men don't come to Salvation by Law, but by a God-man Jesus Christ:
 - (a) **What the Law does and does not do** (Galatians 3:21-25, NIV):
 - (i) The law **shows us what God expects from us.**
 - (ii) The law **does not save, and cannot save.**
 - (iii) The law **imprisons rather than sets free.**
 - (iv) However, **the Law leads us to Jesus (relationship)!**
 - (b) Weakness of the Law: ***"For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature (flesh), God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering."*** (Romans 8:3, NIV):
 - (i) Law can **point out sin**
 - (ii) Law can **condemn sin**
 - (iii) Law can **even stimulate sin** (because of the wickedness of men's hearts)
 - (iv) But **Law is powerless to remove sin!**
 - (c) ***"The Law was put in charge to lead us to Christ"*** (Galatians 3:24, NIV):
 - (i) The purpose of the law is to **lead** us to Christ
 - (ii) ***Paidagogos***: *little child leader, more a baby sitter than a teacher!*
 - (iii) ***"that we might be justified by faith"*** (in Him -- relationship)! (Galatians 3:24, NIV)
 - (iv) **We must be careful to ensure that our presentation of the Scriptures always leads people to a relationship with Jesus Christ!**
 - (a) **We cannot preach from the Scriptures solely for the sake of the Scriptures...**
 - (b) **We must always have in heart and mind our relationship with our Lord!**
 - (c) **That is why the Scriptures exist – to lead us to Jesus!**
- B) The People Who Primarily Saw ***Religion as Ritual*** – But God Said Relationship (Isaiah 1:1-20):

- 1) James writes saying, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (James 1:27, NIV)
- 2) It is not just the ritual; it is the relationship that one has with his fellow man.
 - (a) Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35, NIV).
 - (b) **What is our relationship to one another saying about us?**
 - (c) **What is our relationship with one another saying about our relationship to the world around us?**
- C) **The People Who Primarily Saw Religion as Good Works – But God Said Relationship (Revelation 2:1-7; cf. Luke 10:38-42):**
 - 1) Our righteousness is like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6)
 - 2) The work of man reveals his weakness and inability to get it done "right" (Romans 4:3-4; Romans 3:23;
 - 3) Our proper place is to remember our first love:
 - (a) That is to reflect upon and remember Jesus as the single most important relationship in our lives.
 - (b) And having done that we will with glad hearts tell everyone about our first love – because that is what first loves do – they tell of their one true great love!
 - 4) Men don't come to God by their own good works, but rather, by the great and good work of Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13, NIV; Titus 3:4-8).
- D) **The People Who Primarily Saw Religion as Good Stewardship – But God Said Relationship (Matthew 26:6-13):**
 - 1) Men don't come to God by being good stewards, but by the gift of the best of heaven (Titus 3:4-8, NIV)
 - (a) It is by God's stewardship over His creation that we come Salvation (John 3:16)
- E) **The People Who Primarily Saw Religion as "They Have To Be People Like Us" – But God Said Relationship Not Primarily With Us, But With Him! (Mark 9:38-41):**
 - 1) It is not others being like us, but rather, us being transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV).

Conclusion:

Unless the LORD builds^y the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches^z over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. (Psalm 127:1, NIV). – it's about relationship – the Lord has to build it!

- I) As the weeks come and go we will be addressing what it means to have a relationship with Jesus.
- II) As time comes and goes we will be discussing...:
 - A) How a relationship with Jesus is established.
 - B) What is **holiness** and what does it have to do with relationship.
 - C) What is **sin**.
 - D) The relationship between **works and grace**.
 - E) **Lordship**.
 - F) **Obedience**.
 - G) **Servant hood**.
 - H) **Repentance**.
 - I) **Fear** and **reverence** of God
 - J) **What it means to praise God**
 - K) **We can't address the issues of church growth until we understand relationship in Jesus Christ!**
 - L) We **can't effectively discuss "us" until we have discussed "Him"!**

Notes: