



The Tri-Cities Edifier

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Both/And not Either/Or

~by Joshua Creel

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23).

When you hear the word “Pharisee” in a religious discussion, it is rarely good. Most times it is derisively hurled at someone who supposedly “thinks he can earn his salvation” and believes that the commands and examples in the New Testament should be closely followed. At first glance, our text would seem to fit that narrative. Here is Jesus giving a scathing rebuke of the Pharisees’ narrow minded observance of an Old Testament command (tithing in Leviticus 27:30), all the while ignoring the big moral principles God had emphasized; principles which Israel had failed at keeping resulting in her captivity (Hosea 6:4-7). Clearly, the Pharisees shouldn’t worry about strict tithing and they should pay more attention to defending the helpless and loving their fellow man.

Except, that’s not what Jesus said. Many would have Jesus presenting an Either/Or choice: the Pharisees could EITHER strictly observe the Law, OR they could focus on refining their moral character. But Jesus didn’t present an EITHER/OR scenario, rather He said this was a BOTH/AND situation. Note the full verse: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.” (Matthew 23:23).

In paying attention to many of the religious discussion of today, I fear that a false dichotomy is being used. That is, we approach a matter as if it were an EITHER/OR choice, when in fact it is BOTH/AND. There are certainly some matters in Scriptures that are EITHER/OR choices (see Matthew 6:24). However, there are other matters that are clearly BOTH/AND. Here are three matters to consider:

1. **Worship:** Sometimes worship is treated as an EITHER/OR proposition. You can EITHER limit yourself to worshipping by the express commands and examples of the New Testament (singing without instruments, men praying, partaking of the Lord’s Supper each Sunday, etc.) OR you can worship with your heart and emotions. It’s a false dichotomy. God says that worship should be BOTH according to His will (Psalm 50:8) AND with our heart and emotions (Psalm 50:23; 66:1-4).
2. **Caring for others.** There are many discussions going on about a Christian’s responsibility to his fellow man, about how we can serve those around us. Well it’s not a matter of EITHER we need to teach them the gospel OR we need to help the needy. Again, that’s a false dichotomy. Jesus’ will is that we BOTH proclaim the gospel to the needy (Mark 16:15-16) AND that we be a neighbor to all who are in need (Luke 10:25-37).
3. **Salvation.** Sadly, many discussions about salvation take on an EITHER/OR dynamic. EITHER you believe that you are saved by God’s grace, OR you believe you’ve got to follow commands. It’s a false dichotomy. Jesus says salvation is a matter of BOTH God’s grace (John 3:16), AND man’s faithful obedience (John 14:15; Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:19-20).

In short, when it comes to following the will of God, it’s never a matter of following Him in EITHER one way OR another, rather God wants us to embrace a BOTH/AND mentality. May God help us to do so.

Beware of the Cut Rate

Jason Shackelford

We have all seen the commercials advertising the cut-rate car insurance. So-and-so company can save you hundreds of dollars a year if you will switch to them but will it cover all the “mayhem” that is out there in the world? There is always a reason why something is so-o-o-much cheaper than the rest. You always get what you pay for.

In the same way, most of the religious world has invented its own form of cut-rate salvation. They have cheapened the price of discipleship by saying, “God doesn’t care about what we do; He only cares about who we are.” Or many will say, “The wonderful grace of God will overlook every sin I commit as long as I’m in a relationship with Jesus Christ.” They will even go as far as trying to justify this kind of thinking with passages like, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7).

However, this passage is not speaking of Jesus as an umbrella that hovers over our heads and automatically sheds the sin off us. Christians are responsible for the lives that they live. Walking in the light means continually abiding in the commandments of the Lord. The apostle John wrote, “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.” (2 John 9).

Jesus is our master, our king of kings, the divine ruler over this kingdom that He has established. He is Lord. Many people have no problem calling Jesus their Savior but are having great difficulty respecting Him as Lord! I am in no way trying to downplay the fact that God has extended to us His wonderful grace by providing us a Savior, but we cannot ignore the fact that He is our Lord and He demands that we obey Him (Matt.7:21-23). Speaking of Jesus, the Hebrew writer penned, “And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,” (Heb. 5:9).

The cost of discipleship is high (Luke 14: 26-27). Jesus tells us we must be willing to give up family and friends, wants and pleasures of this life, and yes, even be willing to die to self! I can remember my grandmother saying, “Nothing worth having ever comes easy.” Such is also true in the realm of religion when speaking of salvation. Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matt. 7:13-14).

Remember my friends, we always get what we pay for. It’s awful to find out after you’ve had an accident that your cut-rate car insurance wasn’t all that it was cracked up to be. But even worse is the thought of standing before Christ in judgment and learning that what you thought was acceptable to Him was a lie (2 Thess. 2:11-12). When judgment day comes, don’t let it be that you have invested in cut-rate salvation. Search the Scriptures carefully and rightly divide the word of truth while you can, for Jesus said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” (John 12:48).

Cheapening God’s grace will not get you to heaven, but faithful obedience to His word will. The Lord Himself said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” (Matt.4:4). Though the cost may be high, the reward is great! Never settle for cut-rate salvation.