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“Understand the Will of The Lord”

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Like most people, I occasionally catch myself spending too much time on things that aren't spiritually healthy. Being curious about what is going on “out there” is natural, but it can become destructive just as any curiosity can, and something that isn't inherently wrong then turns into a very effective tool for Satan to use against us.

We make a mistake when we assume that it is only the things that God expressly condemns in scripture that we should be on guard against in our efforts to live godly lives. It is that form of reasoning that is often present in statements like “the bible doesn't say its wrong,” or “I can't see any harm in it.” There may be no harm in it at all in some very specific context, while the thing may be disastrous in another.

A professional ice skater might rightly say of ice, “it is good, and absolutely necessary for me,” while an airline pilot prior to takeoff might correctly see an accumulation of ice on the wings of his plane as a very, very bad thing.

God shouldn't have to itemize every bad thing there is for us in order for us to recognize bad things. There are some very abbreviated lists of bad things in scripture, to be sure. Here is one- 1 Cor 6:9-10- *“Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”*

The passage is a clear warning against attempts to justify any of this behavior. It is interesting that so soon after such a pointed condemnation of these things, after such a pointed condemnation of these things, Paul then makes the statement, (vs 12) “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”

Some might react to the statement “all things are lawful” in exactly the opposite way Paul intends here. He acknowledges that many things that are not specifically condemned must be considered also in light of their helpfulness. Paul's concern here is the spiritual helpfulness of physical things that are either good or necessary in some contexts. “I have the freedom to do it based simply on the question of whether scripture condemns it, but I also need to consider the spiritual impact on self and others.”

This is Paul's point. It is critical for us to understand that our standard for judging the rightness or wrongness of a thing must include more than just a concordance search of scripture for the appearance of the thing in some itemization of condemned behaviors. This is how Paul qualifies the list in 1 Cor 6:9-10.

I see this as the thrust of Eph 5:15-21 as well. *“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.”*

Walking circumspectly involves making best use of our unique ability among God's creation to judge not just the rightness or wrongness of some action we contemplate, but also the ultimate effect, spiritually, of that action on self or others. This is understanding **more** than just the commandments of the Lord (lists of condemned behaviors), but also His “will” - what He is trying to accomplish in us, what He desires for our lives.

Jesus: Born to Die

by Al Diestelkamp

During the recent holiday season I took note of a few posts on social media from brethren who, while not trying to defend December 25 as the actual birthday of Jesus, are heartened that—at least for a brief time—more people are focused on Jesus, possibly leading to an opportunity for us to get them to consider the whole gospel of Jesus. While such opportunities may be available, we must be careful to not endorse untruth.

Then there are a few who take it a step further, suggesting that there is no harm in arbitrarily choosing a date on which to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The accounts of Jesus' birth by Matthew and Luke provide ample reason for us to find joy in that blessed event anytime but stops short of inventing a "holy day" for such a purpose.

It is an inescapable fact that the inspired scriptures from Acts through Revelation make only two explicit references to the birth of Christ. The apostle Paul refers to Jesus' birth being "of the seed of David" (Rom. 1:3), and to His being "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). Also absent from the history and letters to the churches are instructions or any examples of the disciples (who were guided by the apostles of Christ) placing special emphasis on the birth of the Savior.

Perhaps the most significant fact is that there is no biblical indication that Jesus desires that the day of His birth be celebrated as a holy day. What other events in Jesus' life that men have set apart as religious holy days are worthy of our imitation? There's the Feast of Transfiguration on August 8; Epiphany (also known as Three Kings Day) on January 6; The Feast of the Baptism of Jesus on the Sunday following Epiphany, and many more.

To invent ways to worship and honor Christ other than ways authorized in the Bible reminds me of the time when King David had it in his heart to build a house for the Lord (1 Ki. 8:17). Although David's heartfelt desire was commendable (v.18), his plan was not God-authorized. God asked, "Have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'" (2 Sam. 7:7).

What Jesus desires is that we remember and proclaim His death (1 Cor. 11:23-26). Jesus was born to die! Matthew, Mark, and Luke all give accounts of at least three different occasions when Jesus spoke of His upcoming death: following the feeding of the multitudes (Matt. 16:21-23; Mk. 8:31-32; Lk. 9:21-22); after His transfiguration (Matt. 17:22-23; Mk. 9:30-32; Lk. 9:43-45); and as He and His disciples were on their way to observe the Passover (Matt. 20:17-19; Mk. 10:32-34; Lk. 18:31-34). John's gospel adds other situations in which Jesus alluded to His upcoming death in more subtle ways (Jn. 12:7-8; 13:33; 14:25).

I have no interest in judging one who chooses to "esteem one day above another," even if he "observes it to the Lord" (Rom. 14:5-6); but I do think that he should be careful not to validate speculative elaborations of biblical events or perpetuate man-made traditions as if they are divinely ordained holy days.

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