

BAD RELIGION AND WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT GOD - Part sixSunday, July 29th, 2012, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1579

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BAD RELIGION SAYS THERE ARE NO ABSOLUTE WORSHIP PATTERNS FOR CHRISTIANS. THEY CAN CHOOSE ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN TASTE AND TEMPERAMENT

The first few marks of bad religion we've studied were of a different nature from this one. Some lies are absolutely *fatal*. Others, like this one today, are more *divisive and confusing*. The damage they do is less a matter of flat out heresy than a subtle deterioration of important matters of piety. But I still think today's issue *is* of high importance to the life of any church. Certainly, with a church our size, we will never have total *agreement* about worship style. But we should, at least, be able to have everyone *understand why* we do what we do.

What about our corporate worship? Is it all up for grabs? Does God even care? Many people hold the idea that because we are now under the new covenant, and because we are now on the *post-side* of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, worship is no longer according to any specific pattern. They take the phrase, God is seeking worshipers who will "*worship Him in Spirit and in truth,*" to mean worship is now totally a matter of inward motivation and inclinations and promptings and comfort levels.

And there is certainly a precious truth to be defended in that view. It is very easy for worship to become mechanized in both formal and informal ways. Man has a terrible propensity to create a ritual - a religious routine - out of almost anything spiritual and life-giving. That much is true.

But we also need to remember that the Holy Spirit who comes among us to lead us into worship - to stimulate our awareness of the presence of Jesus - is also the *same* Holy Spirit who gave us the record of the early, Spirit-filled, New Testament church. He is the *same* Holy Spirit who preserved the pattern of *how* the New Testament church made its approach to the Father's throne in worship.

In a certain sense, the confusion about worship is understandable. There is *so much* in the Bible about worship. Some of the things we still do, and some of the things we no longer do. How is the Church to sort out what sticks as valid worship instruction for today and what doesn't? Are we free, each one of us, simply to do his or her own thing? **Does God really care how the church worships Him? Isn't it enough that we're genuinely sincere and love Him? Isn't that enough to have in our minds when we come to worship?**

I think we are all aware that there are some *differences* between the practice of worship in the Old Testament and the New. We recognize that, while *God* doesn't change, some of the aspects of worship *do* change. We don't butcher lambs. We don't bring two goats - kill one and release the other out in the wilderness. We don't burn incense. We don't apply the blood of a lamb to our right ear-lobe when we enter the sanctuary. There are a lot of changes in the way we approach the Lord in worship.

So **what changes** and what **remains constant between the Old and New covenants?** How is the church to know which instructions and commands about worship **apply today** and which ones **don't?** **Is it true that we can now worship any way we choose as long as our hearts are sincere?** That's what this message is all about.

Let me give some simple ideas for gleaning instruction for worship from God's Word:

1) **ALWAYS START WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT AND INTERPRET THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE LIGHT OF IT**

Let me give you an example of this from a subject that really has nothing to do with congregational worship. Let's consider the subject of the **creation of Adam and Eve and the beginning of history as we know it.**

As you know, there are plenty of questions about the early chapters of Genesis. A lot of people wonder just how literally those chapters are to be read. Were Adam and Eve **two actual individuals**, made on that specific day of creation? Or are they a picture of the whole human race? Were they two historic people? Or are they something symbolic and mystical?

To my mind, the way to approach those chapters of Genesis is to go **somewhere else** in your Bible **first**. You don't find the key to **interpreting** those creation chapters by reading **those chapters alone**. You have to search **somewhere else**. There are New Testament passages that shine light on the early chapters of Genesis. Let me show you where you might begin:

Matthew 19:3-6 - "**And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?'** [4] **He answered, 'Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, [5] and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh?'** [6] **So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.**"

Now, this is not a sermon about divorce. But this passage **does** teach the principle of **interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the New**. What **is** very relevant for our study today is the fact that Jesus based all of His instruction about marriage and divorce on the **literal account of the original creation of one man and one woman**. In other words, what we have here is Jesus' view - Jesus, the omniscient (all knowing) Son of God - **His view** on how we should interpret Genesis chapters one through three. The **New Testament** illumines and clarifies the **Old Testament**.

Or here's another example dealing with the same issue:

Romans 5:14-15 - "Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. [15] But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many."

Again, one of the reasons I believe *Adam* was an actual, literal, distinct person is I believe *Jesus Christ* was a real person. Paul talks about Adam and Jesus in the very same sentence. Adam's life had real, solid, historic consequences for the human race. And then Paul says Jesus' life had stunning consequences for the human race as well. Adam and Jesus stand or fall *together* as real people. If Adam can be explained away, so can Jesus Christ. The Fall and Redemption stand or collapse together.

The point of this example is ***the best way to come to a complete understanding of the Old Testament is always to read and understand it in the light of the New.*** Always let the New Testament illumine and control and regulate your interpretation of the Old Testament.

That doesn't mean we think the Old Testament is somehow *less inspired* than the New Testament. It is *all* God's Word. It is all *equally* inspired. But the revelation of the Bible is an *unfolding* revelation. It finds its climax and fulfillment in the incarnation and life and death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

After Jesus ascended into heaven He poured out His Spirit on His church. The church today is the Body of Christ, awaiting the return of her Lord. While we wait, and while we teach, and while we evangelize, we worship. And for direction in our worship, we have the writings of the Apostles - the first inspired leaders of the church - to give us guidance and direction in how we ***approach God's throne.***

All of the other Old Testament Scriptures lead up to their fulfillment in the New Testament. But the final picture - the complete story is ***contained*** in the pages of the New Testament. In fact, and this is a very important statement, ***the Old Testament can only make sense in the light of the New Testament.***

This point explains why the Jews are *still waiting* for the coming of the Messiah. They read much of the same Old Testament you and I read. But they've *rejected* the completion of the story in the New Testament. Because of that, the Apostle Paul says they are totally blind to so many of the passages, even in the Old Testament, where the coming of Jesus was specifically explained.

Now, I've taken far more time than perhaps I should have on this first point because it is *foundational* to everything else I want to say about worship. Is it true that Christians can now worship God any way they choose? Let's examine that question from the revelation of the Scriptures:

2) **MAJOR ON WORSHIP EXPRESSIONS THAT ARE SEEN TO BE PERMANENTLY BINDING, EITHER BY BEING CARRIED OVER FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT TO THE NEW, OR BY BEING CLEARLY INTRODUCED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND PRESENTED AS PERMANENT ADDITIONS TO THE WORSHIP OF THE EARLY CHURCH**

I know there's a lot in this point. Let's break it down. We'll just look at the very first part of it today and finish this point next Sunday:

a) ***Take note of expressions of worship carried over from the Old Testament and continued in the New Testament.*** I can think of several:

i) ***The lifting of hands unto the Lord - Psalm 63:4 - "So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands."***

Anyone with a good concordance could find literally scores of references to the lifting of hands unto the Lord in the Old Testament. The sheer bulk of reference to it is really quite amazing. But that's not why we practice the lifting up of hands unto the Lord.

In the *New Testament* we find something else of even greater importance for the worship of the church: **1 Timothy 2:1-8** - "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. [3] This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. [5] For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. [7] For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. [8] I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling...."

This is a very important passage of Scripture. Paul, and through Paul, the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, takes this very common Old Testament practice of lifting up hands to the Lord - the very same practice David mentions so warmly in the Psalms - and urges the New Testament church - ***no, mandates the New Testament Church*** - to make sure this practice is ***perpetuated in its prayer and worship times*** until Jesus comes again.

"Well, Pastor Don, I think that was just some ***cultural instruction*** Paul was giving to the church. I don't think it's really

for today.”

Then what are we to do with the **rest** of the instructions in that **same** passage in Paul’s letter to Timothy? This is why I read the much longer context of Paul’s comments to Timothy. Is **modesty** still a Christian virtue for the church today? Paul talks a lot about that in these verses. Is it still God’s will we **pray for our leaders**? That’s in the very same passage. Was that just for one culture? And what about when Paul says God “**desires all people everywhere to be saved....**”(4)? Is that just a cultural tid-bit as well?

Clearly, the Apostle Paul wanted people everywhere to lift up holy hands in their corporate times of prayer and worship. Here we find an example of a worship practice that was **introduced** in the Old Testament, but was also **carried over** by specific instruction for the New Testament.

Now, this isn’t a sermon on lifting hands in worship. You may come from a church tradition that never referred to any of those verses or practiced this in corporate worship. And that’s not my issue in this point.

The bigger issue I’m dealing with - and it’s one that rarely gets dealt with in Sunday worship settings - is **how do we Christians decide how we will corporately worship**? What do we do with our Bibles? How shall we interpret them?

Surely we don’t butcher lambs and oxen and pour out their blood on our altars. But why **don’t** we? We don’t because we’ve all come to an understanding about how the New Testament informs us about the finality and fulfillment of those sacrifices in the Person of Jesus Christ and His atoning death on the cross.

In other words, this issue is a huge one. It might not set off joy-bells in your heart, but you use this idea and rely on it for so much of your Christian understanding.

So, for today, let’s all decide to relish this understanding and grow in our holy commitment to being people of the Word - people who not only **read** our Bibles, but know what they’re **doing** when they have to think about what they’re reading and applying what they’re reading to how they will serve and follow and worship our Lord in the church today. Worship is tied to Bible, not to temperament. God still speaks as to how He is to be worshiped.

More on this important topic next week.