

SPEAK AS THE ORACLES OF GOD

One of the fundamental duties that we have as Christians is to be sure that we understand God's will (Ephesians 5:17). Peter further exhorts us to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). That is, what we believe, say and teach must be in harmony with God's will and word. Not doing so brings one under condemnation, it is sinful, and puts one in rebellion against God.

That is not to say that one should not ask questions. Questions are good and proper and help increase knowledge. Questions can lead one to salvation, as in the case of the people in Acts chapter 2, "what shall we do?" In writing the first letter to the Corinthians Paul answers many of their questions, along with rebuking their sinful practices and attitudes. Several times he warns them away from their own ideas and back to Christ's gospel. In the second letter he congratulates them on their reformation back to God's will. Even the Bereans in Acts 17:11 were questioning Paul's teaching. However, they promptly checked it against known Scripture, and verse 12 tells us that many of them believed.

It is critical to note that in all of these cases, and many others, the people changed to conform to God's will, even Paul himself went through this. They were given answers based on Biblical truth. There are plenty of others who did not change when confronted with truth. Even on the day of Pentecost there were many who were not baptized. Jesus was constantly teaching the Jewish leaders and few of them were converted. They heard the same message, so what was the difference? Their heart! These were not willing to change. They offered countless excuses, but the result was the same: rebellion against God.

We must be sure that when we are studying or answering questions that we base our answers only on what the Bible actually says; not on our wishes, assumptions, or pre-conceived ideas. According to Paul, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Therefore we do not need nor want anything else. As soon as we begin supplying extra information and creating new doctrine with it, we change God's word and are in sin. On the other hand, if we take part of his word and throw it out, we are equally guilty.

Many people, for example, refuse to accept the truth regarding baptism. They will not acknowledge the simple, plain truth that is taught in the Bible no matter how many times one tries to explain it. What are we to do with these people? Should we just overlook it? Dare we accept them into the church? Name any number of things in place of baptism and we have the same problem: salvation by faith only, predestination, institutionalism, proper worship on Sunday (singing and the Lord's supper in particular), marriage and divorce, Sabbath keeping, the organization of the local church, the social gospel, and on and on we could go.

So, what are we to do? As a general principle, since sin is involved, we must confront them with it (Galatians 6:1). In the case of sins of a private matter, they should be dealt with privately. If it continues, a few others should be brought into it, and if there is still a refusal to change, then it is to be brought before the entire church (Matthew 18:15-17), to be publicly confronted and put out of the church if need be, with the

warning to keep no company with them except to exhort them to repent (2 Thessalonians 3:14). All of this is done in order to get the sinner to change. Aside from the general principle mentioned above, the Bible gives several specific cases where this kind of action is to occur: the disorderly (2 Th 3:6), those who will not work, and busybodies (2 Th 3:11), the divisive (Titus 3:9-11, Romans 16:17), those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11), the fornicator, covetous, idolater, reviler, drunkard, and extortioner (1 Corinthians 5:11). Certainly we can see from these passages that ANY sin should bring this kind of action about. We all need to be involved in this process, for not doing so is also rebellion.

Let us all strive to better understand and more perfectly obey the Lord's commands, for his word is what we will ultimately be judged by, "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). Think about it!

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