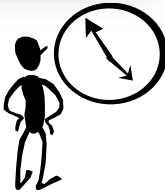


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
(Or every other week)

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.
Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

I Don't Go There

By Jefferson David Tant

People use many devices to mitigate or cancel out plain Bible teaching. This ancient practice can be traced to the Old Testament. Seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah was dealing with a rebellious people. God told him:

"Now go, write it on a tablet before them and inscribe it on a scroll, that it may serve in the time to come as a witness forever. For this is a rebellious people, false sons, sons who refuse to listen to the instruction of Jehovah; who say to the seers, "You must not see visions;" and to the prophets, "You must not prophesy to us what is right, speak to us pleasant words, prophesy illusions." Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 30:8-11).

It is hard to imagine a more blatant rejection of God - people who believed in God. But this attitude is not confined to ancient times. We see it in different ways in our generation.

"I don't go there."

A Lutheran Church (ELCA) controversy concerns ordaining practicing homosexuals. An Atlanta trial (January 2007) dealt with Pastor Bradley Schmeling and his "marriage" to another man. A church supporter, James Mayer, was interviewed by a reporter who asked "about Biblical verses that condemned homosexuality. Mayer's posture stiffens. He says: 'I don't go there.'" Problem solved! Just don't open the pages that deal with this sin.

"I don't see it that way."

After a sermon, my father, Yater Tant, spoke to a visitor who questioned his use of Mark 16:16. With no comment on the verse, my father turned to it and read, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned."* The lady responded with "I don't see it that way." She what?! She obviously "saw" what it said, but

rather than say “I don’t believe it,” she softened her unbelief by saying she didn’t “see” it that way.

“That was just Paul’s opinion.”

When I have asked people about the practice of women preachers, which is condemned in I Timothy 2:12, the response I often get is, “Paul was a woman hater,” or “That’s just Paul’s opinion.” In other words, their opinion is just as good as Paul’s.

“I don’t preach against sin.”

This fits well with the people in Isaiah’s day. A popular mega-church preacher in our time is Joel O’Steen, who had a 40,000-member church in Houston. When interviewed by an Atlanta newspaper reporter about his popularity, he explained that he just wanted to make people feel good, so he didn’t preach against sin. There may have been a huge elephant in the middle of his church building, but his advice would be just to ignore it.

“That’s not what it means.”

A favorite ploy, when faced with a very clear but disliked verse, is to dismiss it by claiming it doesn’t mean what it says. This is a favorite with homosexuals who have to deal with numerous scriptures that flatly condemn homosexuality.

“That’s not the kind of God I serve.”

Those were the words of a young Baptist preacher I talked with in New Mexico many years ago. I had asked him if he believed in “salvation by faith only.” When he agreed, I asked him to read James 2:24 and explain it. “*Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith.*” He read it, closed the Bible, and admitted he had never read that verse, but that made no difference. Case closed - Bible closed - mind closed.

“It’s not in my Bible.”

One lady argued with Yater Tant that Mark 16:16 was not in her Bible. My father insisted it was and called for her Bible. She was right! She had taken scissors and cut the offending passage out. I guess that’s one way to deal with offending scripture.

“I don’t want to hear it.”

Then there are those who just plainly state that they don’t want to hear what God’s word says. Like the little child who just covers his ears when he doesn’t like what his parent is telling him. And so it was with Israel of old. “*For this is a rebellious people, false sons, sons who refuse to listen to the instruction of the LORD; who say to the seers, "You must not see visions"; and to the prophets, "You must not prophesy to us what is right, speak to us pleasant words, prophesy illusions. "Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel"* (Isaiah 30:9-11).

But of course, they will hear at the Judgment Day.

“*Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it*” (Jeremiah. 6:19).

The Importance of One Another

By Doy Moyer

Christians share together a bond in Christ. We often stress the need for personal responsibility and individual accountability, yet we should also see that Christianity is built upon a “one another” model. God did not intend for us to walk alone in our journey of serving the Lord. This is demonstrated through a number of passages, but perhaps the most obvious way to see it is in Jesus’ own statement: “*I will build My church*” (Matthew 16:18).

“Church” (*ekklesia*) refers to a group or assembly and does not refer to one person alone. Christ promised to build a group of people who would serve Him, and again, while individual responsibility is vital (Ephesians 4:16), the idea was never for one Christian to be an island with no contact, help, or love from other Christians. Paul wrote that walking in a “*manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called*” includes having humility, gentleness with patience, and “*bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:1-3). “One another” is a key to our walk.

Jesus told His disciples to “*love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:34-35). The relationships we have with other Christians are important enough that Jesus said this would serve as proof of discipleship. Paul told his readers that “through love” they are to “*serve one another*” (Galatians 5:13). Christians cannot afford to try to walk alone in serving the Lord, for they would be neglecting one of the most important features of love and service: one another.

Not only are Christians to love and serve one another, but they are also to “*outdo one another in honor*” and “*live in harmony with one another*” (Romans 12:10, 16). They are to “*welcome one another*” (Romans 15:7) and “*Greet one another*” (Romans 16:16). Paul wrote, “*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you*” (Ephesians 4:32). They should speak to one another in song (Ephesians 5:19) and submit to one another in reverence (Ephesians 5:21). James wrote, “*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed*” (James 5:15). We can keep going with a multitude of such “one another” passages, each strengthening the idea that Christians are meant to be together so that they can support and help each other.

One of the most important aspects of our togetherness is that of strengthening each other and lifting each other up in the face of potential discouragements. Encouragement is necessary for edification, and these require “one another” interactions. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “*Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). The Hebrews writer is clear on the

need for encouragement, especially given the context that there were Christians who were tempted to leave Christ for their old ways.

“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:12-14).

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:23-25).

These passages show us the importance of patiently encouraging and strengthening one another in faith because there is always a danger of drifting away from the Lord. To that end, God has given His people the gift of each other, and this is not to be taken lightly or dismissed. Through pride one might like to think, “I don’t need help” and “I can do this on my own,” but the Lord knows us better than that. He built His church so that His people would not be alone and could lean on one another through the good and bad.

Relationships are vital in Christ and God knew what He was doing in His wisdom to create a circumstance in which people must cooperate, work together, love together, and edify one another. This is such a critical aspect of Christianity that John wrote, *“And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother”* (I John 4:21).

Let us, therefore, take care of one another and never neglect this special gift that is so integral to being His church.

Vomit

By Jared Hagan

Sometimes, the Bible is quite gruesome. This isn’t done to glorify violence or grossness. Frequently, this is done to emphasize a point.

To me, one of the most disgusting passages in the Bible is Isaiah 28:8. It’s a picture of the moral decay of God’s people, but it is told with vivid detail. It would be one thing to say that the people were really bad. But that does not impress upon us just how bad they were in God’s sight. They were drunkards (Is. 28:1). Astonishingly, so were the priests and prophets (Is. 28:7). To accurately understand the depth of their wickedness, we get Isaiah 28:8. *“For all the tables are full of filthy vomit, without a single clean place.”* That sort of imagery goes way beyond telling us they were drunkards. It’s much grosser than just a straight forward statement.

To me, the Bible doesn't get much grosser than that. In my experience there are two kinds of people. There are those who mildly prefer not to vomit, and then there are those who have such gut wrenching experiences that they would almost rather die than vomit-even the thought of getting sick makes them queasy. I fall into the latter category. And so, Isaiah 28:8 is a horrifyingly vivid picture that I'd just as well not imagine or think about. And isn't that why God has included it? We are supposed to be disgusted at their behavior. We're supposed to see them the way God saw them.

That is not the only time God uses vomit to graphically make His point.

Consider the imagery that God uses of foolish people who, instead of learning from their mistakes, keep doing the same foolish things over and over again. *"Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly"* (Prov. 26:11). We all do foolish things from time to time. But do we learn from those mistakes? If not, then we are extremely gross.

Proverbs 26:11 gets quoted in the New Testament. Here, the meaning is much clearer. It's talking about more than just being foolish (which could include a wide range of subjects including sticking fingers in a power outlet). This time, it's talking about sin (which, of course, is the ultimate foolish action). *"For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit'"* (II Pet. 3:20-22a).

Sin is like vomit. That's a repulsive image I can relate to, but it's a truth I don't internalize. If only I would see greed as vomit. If only filthy language and gossip were equally disgusting. If only lying and arrogance and every other sin was stomach-churningly repulsive to me. If that were the case, I don't think Satan would have much success against me.

Whether we see sin this way or not, it's what sin is. When we learn what God wants and go back to sin anyway, we are spiritually as gross as we can get. We are like dogs returning to the vomit and inexplicably thinking that what we previously could not keep down is now good to eat.

That's gross.

