

DEREK PRINCE MINISTRIES

TEACHING LETTER

Taking God Seriously

Recently, while meditating on various definitions of faith, I came up with my own: Faith is taking God seriously. This was the result of encountering so many Christians who claimed to have faith, but did not take God seriously.

To take God seriously means to take His Word seriously. If a person speaks to us, but we ignore--or even reject--much of what he says to us, we certainly are not taking him seriously. In fact, we are guilty of disrespect.

The same applies to God. If we ignore or reject much of what He says to us through the Scriptures, we are not taking Him seriously. We are, in fact, treating Him with disrespect. Yet this is how many Christians are relating to God. They treat His Word like a smorgasbord, picking out those portions that appeal to their taste and passing the others by.

There are four practical ways in which God's Word applies in our lives: His promises, His commandments, His prohibitions and His warnings. We will take some examples of each in turn and consider how they may apply to us.

God's Promises

The four Gospels contain many wonderful promises of Jesus, but before we claim these for ourselves it is important to ascertain to whom each promise was given. The Gospel writers make a clear distinction between words that Jesus spoke to His disciples and those He spoke either to multitudes or to individuals who were not disciples. There are more than 900 verses recording words spoken to disciples and about 860 addressed to non-disciples.

The distinctive mark of true disciples was commitment. They had made an unreserved commitment to obey and follow Jesus, regardless of personal cost. Jesus Himself laid down this condition:

Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

(Luke 14:27, 33)

Obviously we who are alive today were not present when Jesus was actually speaking. Before we apply any of His promises to ourselves, we need to ask: Am I the kind of person to whom Jesus was speaking? Do His promises apply to me? Do I have the right to claim them?

For example, John 14 contains glorious promises, such as:

Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do.

If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

Because I live, you will live also.

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you.

Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (verses 13, 14, 19, 27)

But these beautiful promises were given only to a group of committed disciples. Peter spoke on behalf of them all when he said, See, we have left all and followed You (Luke 18:28). To claim these promises without fulfilling this condition is not faith, but presumption. We each need to ask ourselves: Am I a disciple--or just a church member?

God's Commandments

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

(1 John 2:3 4)

Our response to God's commandments reveals our true spiritual condition. Obeying them is proof that we know God.

The Bible contains many commandments covering various areas of our lives, but Jesus sums them all up in one that takes precedence over all others:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34 35)

By obeying this commandment we fulfill the entire law: For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Galatians 5:14).

Love is the end purpose for which all other commandments were given:

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk . . . (1 Timothy 1:5 6). Any religious activity which does not produce love is merely wasted effort.

It is on this basis that we must assess our obedience to God's commandments. We need to ask ourselves: Is my life an expression of God's love?

God's Prohibitions

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1 John 2:15)

God here forbids us to love the world. He compels us to make a choice. We can love the world, or we can love God the Father. But we cannot do both. It must be one or the other--either love of God or love of the world.

In the language of the New Testament, the world comprises all people and all activities that are not submitted to the righteous government of God's appointed ruler, Jesus Christ. As such, the world--whether consciously or unconsciously--is in rebellion against God. To love the world, therefore, is to align ourselves with its rebellion.

The pull of the world in all our lives is extremely strong. It offers us many allurements and enticements. Some are seemingly innocent, yet within them is the subtle poison of rebellion.

The media is one main channel of the world's influence, with all the forms of entertainment it offers. I have come to the conclusion that entertainment is not a Christian concept if it leaves people entirely passive. In the Bible God ordained for His people seasons of joyous celebration, but the people themselves were part of the activity. They were never merely passive spectators.

Furthermore, much of contemporary entertainment is permeated by moral and spiritual impurity and has a subtle defiling effect. Some years ago Ruth and I watched a movie that was a brilliant piece of comedy with first rate acting--but it contained a few sequences of vile language. We felt inclined to go and watch it a second time, but eventually we decided that we would not expose the Holy Spirit in us to the vile language in the movie.

Finally we decided that we would never voluntarily expose ourselves to anything that glorified sin and dishonored Jesus Christ. We also make it a principle not to keep in our home any book or other object that dishonors Jesus.

Does that seem radical? Perhaps it may be. But then Christianity is a radical religion.

God's Warnings

In Matthew 24 Jesus gives a prophetic preview of conditions in the last days. He begins with a warning against deception: Take heed that no one deceives you. In verse 11 He repeats His warning: *Then many false prophets will arise and deceive many.* Deception is the greatest single danger that confronts Christians in the last days.

In Matthew 24 Jesus addressed His warning to the apostles whom He Himself had chosen and who had been continuously with Him through the 3« years of His ministry. If these apostles needed such a warning, how can any Christians today imagine that they are immune to this danger?

Yet I have encountered not a few Christians who seem to feel that the warning against deception does not apply to them. This reaction is, in fact, an indication that deception is already at work in them.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 Paul reaffirms the warning against deception in connection with the rise of the antichrist. *The coming of the lawless one [the antichrist] is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

Many charismatic Christians have the attitude that any message or ministry accompanied by supernatural signs must necessarily be from God, but this is not true. The Bible indicates that Satan can also produce various kinds of supernatural signs. The glib acceptance of everything supernatural as being from God actually opens a door to deception.

There is only one sure safeguard against deception: it is to receive the love of the truth. This goes beyond merely listening to sermons, or even reading the Bible. It implies an intense and passionate commitment to the authority of Scripture that affects every area of our lives. It produces within us an instinctive reaction against any message or ministry that is not faithful to Scripture.

God offers to each of us this love of the truth. Are we willing to receive it? Shall we take His warning seriously or shall we ignore it?

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