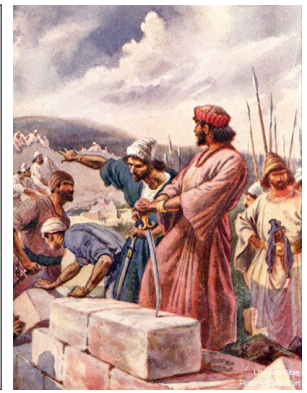


The Sword and The Trowel

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded (Nehemiah 4:17-18)

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Just Looking

Let's suppose it is a Sunday morning and a family of four is visiting. Someone approaches them and extends a welcome. In the course of small talk they are asked about the reason for the visit. Perhaps they offer the well-worn statement that generally may at first appear to be disappointing. They say, "We're just looking for a church."

Now let me make it plain that looking is not wrong in and of itself. There are very likely many (myself included) who are reading this article and have been looking at one time or another. It might be a good thing and a real opportunity to make some progress. I remember a preacher telling how a man came to services where he preached one time and was just looking. The next week he was back and had about a dozen more with him. Over the course of a year or two that just looking visit had turned into almost thirty people! I wish all just looking cases turned out like that. Who wouldn't wish for it?

Realistically, the just looking scenario most often does not produce return visits. Why? They didn't find what they were looking for. Some are looking for a church that will provide wholesome entertainment for their children. Some are looking for a church with an advanced pre-school program. Some are looking for a church with a certain median age or ethnicity or cultural distinction. Some might be looking for ball teams and some might be seeking emotional fulfillment. The list of what folks might be looking for could go on, but I think you get the picture. None of the things mentioned in this paragraph are inherently evil. The common point thought with all of them is that the New Testament says nothing about the church providing such things. They can be and should be found in other venues and let the church be the church and do its own *specified* work.

Unfortunately (and this is truly sad), there are churches (even churches of Christ) who are catering to those who are just looking for these unscriptural things. Churches know what is going on and so they arrange things and adjust themselves to fit. They shape themselves to meet what people *want*

(or are looking for) and not what they *need*.

Consider the following passage. "*but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*" (1 Tim. 3:15). This tells us what the church is supposed to be involved with - - the truth. The church is to uphold, support, and promote the truth. Where and what is this truth? Jesus said, "*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth*" (Jn. 17:17). Paul wrote, "*because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth*" (Col. 1:5-6). Truth is found in God's word. Truth is the gospel of Christ. Any church that is involved in the upholding, supporting, and promotion of the truth has nothing for which they need to apologize. Neither do they need to turn to other things in order to draw people. Unfortunately, a number of people who are just looking will reject a church that is involved with only promulgating the truth. They do this because truth is not what they are seeking.

Yet there are those who are just looking who indeed are looking for a church that is deeply involved with the truth. Let me hasten to add that such a church may not be a perfect church. Even in the New Testament there were churches that fell short on some things. Nevertheless, they were not "written off." This was due to their commitment to truth. Such a commitment allows opportunity for improvement.

The commitment of a church to the truth will not happen unless the membership is committed on an individual basis. Those who are committed to the truth will realize the value of the truth (Prov. 23:23; Jn. 8:32). They will have a "*love for the truth*" (2 Thess. 2:10) that cannot be found anywhere else. This is shared with others who have a like commitment and love for the truth.

There are a few who are just looking who are looking for a church that is committed to the truth. They *will* return if they discern that truth is the prime feature of the church.

They may be coming from the confusion of denominationalism and will find the truth to be refreshing and stimulating. This might be the first time they have ever heard the truth and they will certainly need to hear it with love (Eph. 4:15). We need to be ready for the ones who are just looking with an honest and earnest intent to find a church that is standing for truth. We need to employ that stand at all opportunities.

A Question

I was asked a question not too long ago on Leviticus 19:27-28. The questioner wanted to know whether this had any bearing on us today.

A couple of things come to mind before moving on. I think verse 26 ought to be included in the answer. I also realize that recent shifts in culture are seen in these verses. We have to admit that body piercing and tattooing have increased dramatically in the last twenty years or so. That may have a lot to do with the question on these passages.

Let us read these passages at this time: "*You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying. You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the LORD.*"

At the time of the delivery of these verses, Israel was in Arabia. It had been less than a year since Israel had left Egypt (the 2nd Passover was kept in Numbers 9:1ff). Much of what is contained in the Law reflected the circumstances Israel had encountered with idolatry. All of this would be vivid in their memories. It goes without saying that the number one problem without the entire Old Testament is idolatry. Idolatry involved drawing away from God as well as a host of immoral and abominable practices. The passages in question probably are in connection with idolatry.

I consulted several commentators who also opine that Leviticus 19:26-28 are in relation to idolatry. Verses 27 and 28 might not necessarily be as clear. However, when

one considers the paintings, drawings, statuary, and engravings of Ancient Egypt, you can see how the Egyptians depicted themselves as having elaborate hair trimmings and body markings. Such was in relation to their pagan religion. It is very likely that this had appeared among the Israelites. It had to be stopped as it was part and parcel of idolatry and Israel was forbidden to have **any** association with **any** form of idolatry. This was what this would have meant to Israel at the time it was written.

As we are probably all aware Leviticus is a part of the Old Testament. As such we are not bound by any of its requirements. The Old Testament was taken away that the New Testament might have pre-eminence (Heb. 8:7-13; Eph. 2:15). In the New Testament we follow the authority of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18-20). It is He to whom we bow in obedience (Matt. 17:5).

Therefore, these verses do not have a bearing on us as Law that needs to be obeyed. They do serve as an example (1 Cor. 10:11). The example would be in abstaining from things associated with idolatry.

In our present cultural climate we have seen an increase in body piercing and tattooing. Some of it may be idolatrous and/or blasphemous. In such cases it would be wrong (Matt. 22:37). I cannot see how one's physical appearance is enhanced by piercing or tattooing. Of course, that does not make it right or wrong. Some may find piercing and tattooing repugnant. That does not allow us to misuse the Scripture. I think wresting the Scriptures to make Leviticus 19:26-28 fit circumstances today, and then bind it, is far more troubling than a piercing or tattoo! Let's be very careful about this.

Our Role In Conversion

Several years ago, while we were still living in Indiana, the Midtown Church in Bedford had a Gospel Meeting. They had invited a man from the Indiana side of Louisville, Kentucky to preach. We went a couple of times that week. After this meeting was over it came up in a conversation between Martha and I.

The preacher made a point one night to discuss his history of preaching the gospel. According to what he told us, he had been very successful over the years. No one argued the point. A brief mention of this would have been sufficient. However, he went on about it at length. Martha and I were both very uncomfortable with this. "I had _____ baptisms at a Gospel Meeting last May." I converted _____ people last year." "I baptized _____ this year." On and on it went until it was over-

whelming.

This is not to say that this man was the only one ever to do something like this. I have read in brotherhood publications about preachers doing a lot of converting. I guess it makes a weighty resume. I enjoy reading biographies of faithful men as well as works discussing the history of the church. I have noticed on occasion the same thing there.

Personally speaking I have never that thought I had converted anyone and have never felt a need to carry on about it. The reason is that I play a minimal role in the whole process. It is true that preaching is to be done by human beings (1 Cor. 1:21). The power to convert the soul in the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16), I have none myself. I always remind myself of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:5-8, "*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.*" I am planting and-or watering. It is God who ought to get the glory. I don't really need any glory in such matters and I do not think any should seek it in even the most remote way.

"Storms of Life"

This past Sunday brother Jerry Childers had an excellent sermon on "Storms of Life." One of the scriptural citations he used was from Matthew 7:24-27. Jerry used this to show where we ought to be when these storms of life hit. This stimulated my thinking.

I want you to notice in these passages that there are two groups of people involved. One group hears and obeys and stands. The other group hears and doesn't obey and falls. Both groups are hit by the storms of life. In either case, the wording is the same, "*and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house.*"

This is an important point to consider. The storms of life occur to whoever it is. They are not sent as some sort of divine retribution. They do come to those who are righteous. They do not "passover" the unrighteous. These things happen and they happen to all. I think this is often overlooked. Some believe they are "singled out" by the Lord. Others are surprised that such things happen to Christians. Well, they happen to whoever it is.

Now the thing we really need to remember is a simple question. Where am I when the storms of life come? If I do what Jesus

says, I will stand. If I refuse to do what Jesus says, I will fall. Where am I in anticipation of these things?

Are you prepared for the storms of life? It depends on your willingness to obey the will of the Lord.

Billy And Mrs. White

"Billy, show the class on the board how to work today's problem," said Mrs. White the second grade teacher. Dutifully, Billy writes 2+2=5 on the board. "Oh, Billy," exclaims Mrs. White, "that is not correct. You must check your book and re-do the problem." Billy checks the book and writes 2+2=4. "You must always work the problems as the book teaches," said Mrs. White. "You are not allowed to just come up with any solution. You must always go by the book."

It turns out that Billy happened to be in Sunday School class at the Flatrock Baptist Church and Mrs. White was his teacher there also. Her class was very much involved in the memorization of Bible verses and Billy was very good at this. "Billy, can you quote a passage about being saved," asked Mrs. White. "Yes, '*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned,* Mark 16:16," Billy replied proudly. "Oh, no," Mrs. White responded in alarm. "You do not have to be baptized to be save." "But, Mrs. White," Billy cried out, "it's in the book just like 2+2=4 is in our school book and you told us to always go by the book." Mrs. White just stood there wondering what to say next.

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