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303 - The All Or Nothing Principle

1. Introduction

We've defined faith as an objective body of truth in revealed scripture. We then defined faithfulness as adherence to the will of God as stated in his word. Within the framework of inspired scripture are principles set forth to guide us as we seek to please the Lord. God has always accepted those who live in accordance with his word, and rejected those who failed to honor his directives. In this lesson we'll discuss The All Or Nothing Principle which emphasizes the need to pay attention to all that God has revealed.

2. Scriptural Relativity

The Bible believing world today is filled with multiple interpretations of the scriptures. Those interpretations represent diverse doctrines reflecting the attitudes and ideas of their originators. Doctrines that take the form of practices that deviate from the biblical pattern. This isn't new. Humans have ignored, rejected and violated God's commands from the beginning.

How much of God's word is open to interpretation and modification when it comes down to spiritual practice? There are Bible believers who view the scriptures as a good starting point for how we live but think there are areas that serve as guidelines that can be adjusted to meet current needs and trends. Others see the Bible as a collection of good principles that can be accepted or set aside depending on personal preference. How closely should we adhere to the scriptures and what areas, if any, are we able to exercise personal judgment in? In the Bible believing world these questions have led to a sense of scriptural relativity in which doctrinal statements can be applied or ignored based on the teachings of a particular group or the attitudes of individuals.

In this lesson we'll review

- a. The relationship between faith, faithfulness & doctrine
- b. Examples of failures to adhere to God's commands
- c. Warnings about changing God's word
- d. Christ's attitude toward God's word
- e. A summary of the All Or Nothing Principle

Let's take a look at each of these.

3. The relationship between faith, faithfulness & doctrine

There are attributes to the Bible that need to be taken seriously. In the last lesson I reviewed the fact that true faith begins with what is revealed in God's word (**Rom 10.17**). I then demonstrated that the faithful are identified as those who heard God's word and adhered to it. The doctrine of the Bible is therefore composed of instructions, commands, examples and inferences that direct our activities. The goal for these is to reunite us with God and prepare us

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for eternity. A foundational concept that must be understood is that the word revealed through the Holy Spirit is God's. The Lord is the author of all scripture (**1 Tim 3.16**) and although human agents were entrusted to record it, the content belongs to God. That's a point that needs to be highlighted and promoted. It's also one that appears to be ignored in varying degrees by the majority of disciples in the world.

We understand the concept of intellectual property, or IP. We're also very acquainted with the idea of violations from outright infringement to illegal appropriation of protected content. The advent of the Internet has brought about a proliferation of abuses from sharing content to outright theft. Copyright owners have been tasked with protecting their property and taking action against infringements. In the United States we've seen federal action and fines from groups such as the Recording Industry Association of America. YouTube content creators are frequently penalized with copyright strikes for using material such as music. We're not going to discuss the merits of cases in which claims have been levied against individuals unfairly. We understand the concept. The anonymity of the web has led to a feeling of entitlement for many to use content others have created for their own purposes. Many of those individuals argue that they have a "right" to the content and what they're doing doesn't hurt anyone. What gets ignored is the fact that if it's not your property, and you don't have permission or authorization, using or modifying someone's content for your own purposes is wrong!

The same is true for God's word. The Holy Spirit inspired all of the writers of the scriptures to record exactly what God wanted written (**2 Pet 1.21**). God has never authorized anyone to alter his commands. When that's happened, the result has been catastrophic. Perhaps the idea that God isn't visibly taking action against individuals or groups for changing his word might appear to imply that it's okay to do so. The reality is it's not all right. On the contrary, there are numerous examples in the scriptures showing that when this has happened things don't turn out well. In regard to the doctrine of the Bible one of the first things we need to understand is that the scriptures don't belong to us. No human has ever been granted the right to modify, ignore or otherwise change what God has given us. The fact that God may not send fire and brimstone on our heads for doing so isn't a sign that such a practice is acceptable. It's not.

The content of the revealed word provides information about God, who we are relative to him and how we need to live. Based on the word, we trust in the Lord and his power leading us to act and conduct ourselves in a manner consistent with what we find in the scriptures. The word is therefore the substance of what we believe. Within the word we have instructions to be applied - the doctrine. Application of those instructions then defines one as faithful. If we follow this pattern God will recognize us as his children and we can take comfort that we have a relationship with him, he hears our prayers and will save us when life is done.

When we take it upon ourselves to alter the word, faith is compromised. The content of what we believe is no longer purely based on what God has said. It's now a mixture of what we want to accept and some degree of principles or ideas from the Bible. Unauthorized alteration however no longer identifies us as servants of God. We've become the authors of our own

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version of spiritual practice that God has no obligation to recognize or accept. Some believe that as long as they profess their allegiance to the Lord they'll be accepted based on the state of their heart. As we'll see in a later lesson, turning away from God's word and introducing foreign concepts the Lord hasn't approved of is a clear path to rejection by God.

To simplify things. Faith is based on and defined by God's word. Faithfulness is the application and execution of what has been recorded. Altering any part of God's word or commands is a statement of rejection toward God and constitutes a lack of faith and faithfulness. There are examples throughout the scriptures of this happening.

4. Examples of failures to adhere to God's commands

Adam and Eve were given a paradise home, they were immortal, had a close relationship with God, given meaningful work and provided the means to enjoy one another and populate the world. They were given one prohibition; don't eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God stated a consequence, death, if this happened. Eve allowed herself to be deceived by Satan (**Gen 3.1-6, 1 Tim 2.14**) and violated God's command. Adam also ate the fruit offered to him by Eve but did so with full knowledge that he was violating God's command (**Gen 3.6, 1 Tim 2.14, Rom 5.12-14**). Although they kept the majority of God's commands, one transgression separated them from the Lord.

Cain rejected offering the type of sacrifice God commanded as can be seen in the fact that God accepted Abel's, and Abel is listed as having faith in God (**Heb 11.4**). God spoke to Cain and informed him he too would be acceptable if he did that which was right. Cain didn't listen and killed his brother after which he suffered the consequences for his actions (**Gen 4.9-13**). How hard would it have been to just do what God asked?

The family of man grew over time and began to violate the law of marriage instituted in the beginning by God. Violence increased as well and became such a problem that God decided to destroy all that breathed with the exception of Noah who was faithful to God and obeyed him. The result of rejecting God's model for life resulted in death for the world at that time as recorded in **Genesis 6-9**.

Humans continued to reject God's commands after the flood. God told the family of Noah to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the Earth (**Gen 9.1**). The group however decided to challenge God's power by building a tower and making a name for themselves so they wouldn't be scattered over the world (**Gen 11.4**). God intervened, confusing their language so they couldn't understand each other, and as a result they spread out over the world as God instructed (**Gen 11.7-9**).

Achan violated God's instructions by taking spoils from the city of Jericho (**Josh 7.20-21**). The city was cursed by God with the exception of items of gold, silver, bronze and iron which were to be dedicated to service to God (**Josh 7.17-19**). Everything else was to be

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destroyed and nothing was to be taken by the Israelites. Achan ignored this which caused God to withdraw his blessings from the Hebrews in the next battle against the city of Ai. Thirty-six men died and eventually Achan was caught during the ensuing investigation. Achan and his entire family were stoned for this violation (**Josh 7.22-26**).

Moses was faithful to God. Under his leadership the Hebrews were delivered from Egypt and God issued his Law to them at Mount Sinai. Moses is listed as faithful in **Hebrews 11** and we're told that he made the Tabernacle and all of the items of worship according to the pattern God had shown him. In spite of this Moses failed in one point and suffered the consequences for it. At Meribah the people cried out for water and rose up against Moses (**Num 20.1-6**). God told Moses to gather the people and speak to the rock that stood before them and water would come forth. Moses did as instructed but instead of just speaking to the rock he struck it twice. God provided the water as he promised but Moses was to suffer for his lack of respect for God's commands in front of the congregation. God told Moses, "*Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.*" (**Num 20.12**). Moses was not able to pass over the Jordan river and died outside the promised land because he disregarded the command of the Lord.

Saul was anointed as the first king of Israel and was humble at the beginning of his reign. Over time his pride led him to violate God's law. Saul was told to utterly destroy the Amalekites including their king. Saul allowed prisoners to be taken, animals preserved, and even offered a sacrifice that only the priest could perform. Because of this the kingdom was taken from Saul for his disobedience (**1 Sam 15.1-34**).

David desired to move the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem but he violated God's instructions for doing this. Before the Ark was to be moved the high priest was to take the Vail between the Holy and Most Holy Place and cover the Ark. A second covering of badgers skins was to be added which was then topped off by a blue cloth. The staves were placed in the rings of the Ark that were used to carry it. (**Num 4.5-6**). The sons of Kohath, descendants of Levi, would then come to carry the Ark and other items used in the Tabernacle. The Ark itself would be carried on their shoulders using the staves, not a wagon. (**Num 4.15**).

Of note in these instructions is that the Ark was not to be touched. Anyone who did so would die. This sets the stage for David's first attempt to move the Ark. The Ark was placed on a wagon and as it was being transported began to shake. Uzzah, having good intentions, grabbed the Ark to keep it from falling and was struck dead by God for doing so (**2 Sam 6.6-7**).

Although David was a man after God's own heart and expressed a great amount of zeal for the Lord he failed at times in his life by violating God's will. He became infatuated with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, slept with her, got her pregnant, and then arranged to have her husband killed when his attempts to cover up the sin failed (**2 Sam 11-12**). God sent Nathan the prophet to confront David who repented and confessed his sin (**2 Sam 12.1-13**). The

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consequences however were severe because of the reproach on the reputation of God and his people David had opened the door to. For the rest of his life he would be faced with these beginning with the death of the child Bathsheba conceived (**2 Sam 12.14**).

In the first century the religious leadership appeared to be righteous on the outside but they had become corrupt. The Law had been supplanted by rabbinic traditions that were being elevated above God's law. Their alterations and additions to God's commands weren't pleasing to God. Christ addressed this in his statement, "*This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" (**Matt 15.8-9**) which is a quotation of **Isaiah 29.13**. The unfaithfulness of the religious leadership was demonstrated by an attitude that showed some devotion to God but they exchanged God's directives for "*the commandments of men.*"

The examples I've used cover a range of attitudes and responses to God's word.

- a. Eve was naive and deceived
- b. Adam knew what he was doing but did it anyway
- c. Cain refused to listen to God or change
- d. Men expressed their lust and greed in disregard for God
- e. People thought they could challenge God's power at Babel
- f. Achan's greed and covetousness led him to ignore God's command
- g. Moses allowed his emotions to prevail and he violated God's instructions
- h. Saul's pride and entitlement led him to disregard God's commands
- i. Uzzah's good intentions killed him as he violated God's warnings
- j. David's lust and fear led him to ignore God's Law
- k. The first century Jewish religious leaders saw themselves as above the Law

The bottom line is, no matter what the state of the person's heart was, a violation of God's law was sin. The consequences, often detailed by God in advance, were known, but those who chose not to obey allowed themselves to be overwhelmed or refused to listen and ultimately paid the price. As we survey the scriptures we find multiple reminders that alterations to God's word are forbidden.

5. Warnings about changing God's word

Problems that some Bible believers have is compartmentalizing the scriptures. By that I mean that some place artificial limits on what commands or instructions from God are valid in our world today. There are some who teach that the Ten Commandments are sufficient in guiding our lives. Others believe that what Christ taught while on the Earth isn't binding on us today. Still another group believes that the scriptures represent principles that teach moral lessons, but aren't really a law that one has to live by. There are many other attitudes beyond this and we don't have the time or space to cover even a tiny fraction of them.

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The Law of Moses is no longer valid today. The Patriarchal law was finally taken out of the way for the Hebrews at Sinai and for the Gentiles when Christ died and rose from the dead. The Gospel, made up of the entirety of the New Testament, is the binding authority for us today containing valid principles and truths as well as cautions about our attitudes toward God's word. One of those warnings, appearing throughout the scriptures, is that God's word is not to be altered. Let's take a look at some of these.

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. Deuteronomy 4.2

What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it. Deuteronomy 12.32

Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. Joshua 1.7

Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. Proverbs 30.6

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. Revelation 22.18-19

In addition to these are instructions issued to specific individuals who would serve in various roles. One of those describes the duties of a future king.

And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them... Deuteronomy 17.18-19

This principle appears in the New Testament as we see the Gospel being preached, the church growing, and a need to have sound teachers. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he had not "***shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God***" (Acts 20.27) when he met with them at Miletus.

James warns about teaching when he states, "***Be not many of you teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment***" (Jas 3.1 ASV). James isn't telling us not to

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teach. The warning is that one must teach what God has revealed. Nothing more and nothing less.

Peter alludes to this principle as well stating, ***“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God...”*** (1 Pet 4.11). The oracles of God in this context refers to revealed scripture.

John provides a warning as well as he addresses the need to avoid false teachers. ***“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”*** (2 John 9-11).

Another aspect that reinforces the idea of an all or nothing principle is Christ’s attitude toward God’s word.

6. Christ’s attitude toward God’s word

Christ came into the world to offer himself as the final sacrifice for sin. The message he preached was from his father who sent him to complete the work of salvation that was promised before the world began (Titus 1.2), and stated by God as he spoke with Adam and Eve (Gen 3.15). In his prayer to his father the night before he was arrested and later crucified, Christ speaking of his disciples stated he had ***“...given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them...”*** (John 17.8).

There are two statements Christ made during his ministry that emphasizes the need to respect and preserve the word of God as given. When Satan tempted Christ to turn stones into bread, Jesus replied, ***“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”*** (Matt 4.4). We read this sometimes and understand what Christ is saying about the importance of God’s word being food for the soul. We need to also understand that Christ is placing emphasis on ***“every”*** word of God. Indirectly this reinforces the all or nothing principle. Nothing in God’s word can be ignored or altered, and additions are out of the question.

Another statement of Christ’s that highlights the importance of the word is found in a comment concerning those who rejected him and what he taught. ***“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day...”*** (John 12.48). The word came from God, was first spoken by Christ, completed by the Holy Spirit, and will be the standard of judgment at the end. It makes sense then that we hold to what has been revealed, and only that.

That may sound like an impossible task but it’s not one that can’t be achieved. Paul told Timothy, ***“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”*** (2 Tim 2.15). We can read the words on the page.

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We can understand the information they convey. We can ask questions and meditate, discuss and share thoughts until we come to an understanding of what's stated. That's not impossible. What we have to train ourselves to do is eliminate subjective interpretation and avoiding passages that cause discomfort when we come across them. Reading, thinking, comparing, and changing, will eventually lead us to understand God's word. But we need to understand it on God's terms and only his.

7. Summary of the All or Nothing Principle

We can summarize the conclusions we've reached as ...

- a. God is the author of the word
- b. The Holy Spirit inspired writers to record what God wanted preserved
- c. No one has been authorized to alter God's word in any way
- d. Ignoring, changing or altering God's word will result in eternal loss
- e. God's word is the standard by which we'll be judged
- f. True faith & faithfulness is defined by God's word
- g. Alteration of God's word is a lack of faithfulness
- h. Altering the word and teaching false doctrine is condemned by God

8. Next

Is being a servant of God a matter of knowing what the rules are and mechanically following them, or is there more to following the Lord. In the next lesson, **For The Love Of God**, we'll discuss a desire to serve the Lord as a means of recognizing and respecting God's authority and love for us.