Subject: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of unhappiness...
Posted by william on Sat, 10 Nov 2012 06:30:38 GMT
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Alanbook,

Couldn't come up with a good title but I figured that the pursuit of unhappiness is pretty close to what happens when we label liberty as compromise. Liberation is the message of the gospel even though some use it as an occasion for the flesh.

Here is the deal... if you want someone or some authority to tell you what constitutes 'Christian' behavior then we've got plenty of those types willing to do just that. They can be found on almost every block in every city i.e. the denominations. We had a fair share of them at FA. To think otherwise is only to delude yourself.

(Now before anyone thinks that I'm taking cheap shots, let me say that I appreciate everything that I got from my years at FA--it has made me into who I am today!)

Doing 'Christian' things is the same sort of mentality that we find in the NT. I'm referring to the mentality of the Pharisees. They were quite busy 'doing' things that they thought were Godly. We 'did' the same things at FA. Whenever we learned of something new that we could 'do' or 'not do' we embraced it with gusto. If having faith meant that you didn't wear a pair of glasses then no one wore glasses and we believed that we were 'doing' the will of God. If it meant you couldn't wear pants (for the women) then pants were accursed. If it meant no TV, then we smashed our TVs. I could go on and on (and on,) but you know what I'm talking about.

Once we equated 'doing' these things with the will of God then for us to be in the will of God we had to comply, and comply we did... and if anyone did not comply, they found themselves on the outside looking in. Not just outside of FA, but in our minds outside of the kingdom. (Have I said anything that was untrue yet?)

All religions have their own set of dos and don'ts. This fact is incontrovertible. It was true of the Pharisees, it is true concerning all religions whether we are talking about Judaism, Christianity, or even Adam and Eve in the garden. However, and this is crucial for us to understand, doing (or not doing) certain things, IS NOT EQUAL TO PLEASING GOD.

We have to acknowledge that God has requirements... and all religions whether they serve our God or not believe that meeting requirements is what differentiates a true adherent from a mere pretender.

In this respect we were no different from them all.

However, we were taught, as Adam & Eve were taught, as the children of Israel were taught, and especially as the early Christians were taught, that the requirements were only a means to an end. The end being FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD.

In fact, to prove this, we need only to examine carefully the words of Jesus, and later the words of Paul and James, that the law (or the 'requirements' since I've been using that term) were/was given to bring us to the apex of our religion -- to love God, and to love our neighbor. Even these two can be boiled down to one -- to love God. (Love God and we love what He loves -- i.e. others.)

Adam & Eve didn't have much of a clue as to the meaning of love before the fall and subsequent redemption. They had only one --seemingly arbitrary requirement -- not to eat fruit from a certain tree. We know the rest of the story, they did... and they fell. God immediately brought them into a knowledge of love when He took and by type showed them what true love was all about.

God brought them back into FELLOWSHIP with Himself (the ultimate goal) by His own actions and continues to show throughout the Bible that the centerpiece of it all, was not to give a list of requirements but to, by the schoolmaster of the law (requirements,) to bring them back into fellowship with Himself.

These requirements, according to the teaching of the Bible were NEVER to give one comfort that in meeting the requirements (impossible, btw) one could find bliss in fulfilling God's will, but the design was to show: 1) the Love of God toward us (by taking our place--the vicarious atonement) and 2) the way for us to fulfill God's will was to love Him with our whole heart.

Unlike Adam & Eve before the fall, we now know what it means to love and we can actually truly love Him because we now know what love is, and what it is not. All because He first loved us!

We now know that love for Him can never be expressed by simply adhering to a bunch of requirements but that those 'requirements' were given in order to show us exactly the nature of love.

For example, if God said to us in the NT not to eat apples... apples we would not eat, but we also should have the understanding that not eating apples is not the same thing as pleasing God... there would be (in keeping with the revelation) a principle involved that goes way beyond merely not eating the apple, we wouldn't eat because we would want to maintain the relationship with Him... eating would break that relationship.

God's will is fulfilled when we love Him with our whole heart. I think that is the reason we find precious few 'requirements' in the NT without a direct connection to love, or love of others.

I think that the early Christians understood this even though it was a tough transition having come

out of Judaism.

A good example that highlighted the rough transition from a religion of dos and don'ts (which, as I've said already wasn't designed with that approach in mind) is the situation described in Acts 15.

In that example you have the old mentality confronting the proper interpretation of the OT which should have taught them the lesson of pleasing God.

There was a whole segment of the early Church that was in danger of missing the precise message of the Gospel by substituting the old way of thinking for the revelation that had just been given to them.

When the gentiles received the gospel they were forced to make a decision: Were they going to stick with the thing that defines all religions or were they going to allow the true revelation of God to prevail?

Thankfully they settled the question by choosing the latter. On the surface it might seem that they only generalized the dos and don'ts into something they thought that the gentiles could handle --giving them only 4 requirements -- but in reality the things that they asked of the gentiles only cemented the truth that they had received:

Acts15:20-21 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

Even if we want to have a list of dos and don'ts this particular list shouldn't be too hard to keep... but in keeping with what I've already said --that the will of God isn't in meeting requirements but the deeper principle of love-- how should we view these 'requirements?'

First of all --abstaining from the pollutions of idols-- this one isn't hard to grasp because if we love God we'll not have any idols. Paul later has much to say concerning eating meat sacrificed to idols perhaps due to this very letter. As is so often the case people love to have it spelled out what it is they can 'do' or 'not do' and Paul rightly puts the issue squarely where it belongs --the Christian liberty category.

Secondly, --abstaining from fornication-- this one sounds like a commandment but consider this: fornication was synonymous with idol worship in both a spiritual sense (Israel had committed fornication with every idol that came along) and a physical sense (the Greeks were known for their temple prostitutes which was actually a part of their religious services.)

Further, leaving the spiritual/religious-idol aspects, fornication was not a victimless sin. The NT teaches that by committing fornication we sin against our own bodies. We know that whosoever

commits fornication becomes one with the other party and that it effectively breaks the one-flesh relationship that categorizes marriage. This of course is inconsistent with our professed love for our spouse, love of course being the operative message of the gospel.

For the unmarried some of the same questions are raised, how can we say that we love someone when we are using them for our own purposes without any commitment beyond that? Not to mention the stigma that we attach to not only ourselves but to the other party. Promiscuity damages both parties... certainly this is not consistent with the gospel message of love.

Thirdly, --abstain from things strangled and from blood-- again, this isn't a bad commandment IF YOU LIKE COMMANDMENTS!!! Having said that, the context is what should guide us and since I'm intent on showing that true Christian religion isn't focused upon 'requirements' we need to think about the reason for this plea for abstinence.

By the way, none of these things are presented as COMMANDMENTS or REQUIREMENTS... they are what James says --a request that the gentiles voluntarily 'abstain' from these things... remember Paul rejects the idea that eating meat sacrificed to idols is somehow the breaking of a commandment and shows that it only becomes sin when we wound the conscience of others --LOVE IS ALWAYS THE MESSAGE!

Anyway, back to 'things strangled and blood'... this was a gentile specialty, maybe even a delicacy! BUT for the Jews this was one of the most odious things that the gentiles did.

They had a clear commandment that forbade them from eating bloody meat... it was extremely offensive to them.

Actually all of the things mentioned were extremely offensive to the Jews. It was this extreme offensiveness that prompts James (as the leader of the Church at Jerusalem) to write this letter to the gentiles asking them to abstain from these practices. He tells us that in the next verse:

For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. Acts 15:21

How could they ever hope to reach the Jews with the message of the gospel if those Jews, who were well aware of the commandments, saw gentiles practicing these things?

James, like Paul in his letters, stressed the absolute necessity of putting aside those things that would cause others to stumble. This is certainly not a novel idea... setting aside our freedom for the sake of the gospel message is truly an expression of love which again --is the very heart of the gospel.

Now if one wants to continue to measure ones commitment to God by what they do or don't do,

then all I've said is in vain. Sure, the Bible speaks of those who use their liberty as an occasion for the flesh and I'm sure examples abound. If you want to spend your time trying to dig those logs out of their eyes, go ahead... what have you proved? Any fool can use the religious dos and don'ts to ascertain a persons commitment to the outward standards of a particular religion but is this an accurate or even a productive pursuit?

Christianity is measured by our love for God and our love for our fellow man, period.

I don't care if one thinks that he's got someone else all figured out or not by whether he smokes a cigar (I do!), drinks a beer (I don't), wears a tee shirt with a message (sometimes), plays football, watches football (more my style), studies the bible enough, worships at a denominational church, wears glasses, celebrates a holiday, votes, etc., etc.,... these things and a hundred more besides, will never be the test of a true Christian no matter how much we'd like to think they are.

You simply cannot judge a man's heart and whether or not he is in fellowship with God unless he gives himself away by not loving others (a TRUE test,) or by proving himself to be an infidel with something other than those outward religious requirements, some of which I have mentioned.

Blessings,
William

Subject: Re: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of unhappiness...
Posted by Gary on Sat, 10 Nov 2012 13:36:33 GMT
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William,

I don't know if I have labeled liberty as compromise but it was never intended if that is the case, but I assume you are just making a point from the other post.

I will have to think about this whole subject here.

When HF was alive and our church was going strong, I do remember if I ever felt any "unhappiness" in or out of the meetings. If anything I had constant joy in my life.

I never felt that anything was being forced on me or I was losing something by not being like other churches who allowed anything and everything to take place among its members. I'm not implying anyone here felt that way but I remember the Joy, fellowship, and love for the things of God.

In fact in the beginning years I felt and still think this way that our church was closer to the NT

church pattern more then any I have yet to see.

Granted more towards the end and looking back with hindsight I can see were there was a turn of events that changed everything.

You mention liberation is the message of the Bible and I agree, but also you mention that some use it as an occasion to the flesh.

I do not think that I have achieved more happiness in life now that we can all have tvs, sports or whatever we desire to pursue.

To be honest with you I do not see anything wrong with a brother who smokes a cigar, drinks a beer or wine, goes to a doctor, and who decides he wants to vote.

Taking the letter of the law and making certain practices a rule can be the downfall of any group.

What the Pharisees did was make laws for others but they did not practice them and made excuses when it came to their own lives.

The Bible on the other hand does tell us that we're to forsake all and follow Him. Its repeated throughout the NT. Christ is to be the center piece of our lives while the things of this world will grow slowly dim.

I think even though we have liberty we are free to choose without any hindrances, to serve Christ and follow after Him, is why God gave us this liberty.

Ultimately our lives is as a breath of smoke and we will live forever and ever. So even though we are free in this life and have the option to be involved in some things this old world has to offer, Is it profitable?

"I think only what's done for Christ will last".

I am not disagreeing with what you posted but I am thinking that the pendulum can swing too far with liberty and all of us are in danger if we do not realize that we have an enemy who is working behind the scenes to influence us towards this world. Our lives affect other people more then what we realize especially when we can "see and hear" the message that Jesus gave.

There is so many who ran with liberty that today their lives are shipwrecked. I know of people who have been divorced five or six times, listen heavily to rock and roll, watch what they want when they want, and they think they are above everyone and still pleasing God. This is people who set under the Word but now proclaim they have liberty. In these cases liberty has opened a wrong door down a wrong path.

Anyway I realize there is balance in everything but I think its better to lean towards some type of restraining from this worlds pleasures, there is nothing wrong with disciplining ourselves in certain areas and of course not forcing them on others.

In Him,
Gary

Subject: Re: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of unhappiness...
Posted by william on Sat, 10 Nov 2012 16:32:42 GMT
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Quote:I don't know if I have labeled liberty as compromise but it was never intended if that is the case, but I assume you are just making a point from the other post.

No, forget the title... I used this only as a hook and if I'd thought more about it another title would have been more appropriate.

Maybe something like The Christian Desire to Have Objective Standards to Follow In Place of Subjectivity (...being Holy Spirit led). Don't think I'm saying the objective standard (the Bible) is not important for ascertaining doctrine... certainly it is, but to turn Christian liberty (that the Bible teaches) into a standard for what we can and cannot do (do's and don'ts) just for the sake of keeping everyone in line, does a great disservice to its primary message.

It's a great disappointment that God never thought about those who would take Christian liberty and use it for the gratification of the flesh, when He inspired His Word... (obviously I jest!)

Really, when you think about it, why do we spend so much time worrying about those who use Christian liberty as an excuse for sin? An unregenerate person will be an unregenerate person. So what if it makes them feel better to justify their unbridled passions by using terms like Christian liberty? If God were concerned about that group all He would have needed to do was stress the do's and don'ts and give us all a little less of that Christian liberty stuff.

But that's the point... He didn't. And because He didn't, why is it now our responsibility to make

the Bible into something that it is not? Why do we like to beat the servants with a club that wasn't designed for that purpose? Why take the good news and use it as a yoke of bondage? Are we afraid that they are going to get away with something? Is God not aware of the heart?

The problem with that approach is, that even if we can somehow curb the unbridled passions of others, we still haven't changed their hearts. In fact, we may do more harm than good when we turn someone into an outward conformist because it is possible that they will go into eternity thinking that they are 'doing' God's will when they really haven't even been affected by the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

Blessings,
William