

Do you ever consider what is from God and what is from church?

This past Sunday the readings from the lectionary dealt with what God calls us to do and, in the Gospel, what religions call us to do. They are not always the same, though some might think so.

In the reading from the Gospel according to Saint Mark, Jesus is confronted by Pharisees for His disciples' disobedience of the laws surrounding hand washing. Jesus responds by saying that the Pharisees "abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition." (Mark chapter 7 verse 8 – read all of chapter 7 to get a better context of the conversation – really read all of the Gospel of Mark to really get it and the 29th chapter of the prophet Isaiah).

Now this raises some interesting points.

When to the rules of a church get confused for the laws of God?

In my sermon on Sunday I asked what would happen if I announced that this coming Sunday we were going to worship using the Presbyterian Book of Common Worship and the following Sunday we would use the Lutheran Book of Worship and the Sunday after that we would worship in a Baptist way (first choosing one of the many area Baptist churches to emulate) and then the Catholic Missal and so on and so forth.

Clearly some would be upset for we worship using one of the liturgies from the 1979 Episcopal Book of Common Prayer – a descendent from the original 1549 Anglican Book of Common Prayer which symbolized the split from Rome by presenting the worship, prayers, and scriptures in English. That was quite scandalous at a time when worship was only allowed / legal in ecclesial Latin.

So what are the other rules that churches impose, but God did not.

Some consider the King James version of the Bible to be the only true and valid translation. The King James translation was completed in 1611AD. I enjoy reading the Wycliffe (1384AD) and Tyndale (1525AD) and the Geneva Bible (1560 AD). Did God command, "You shall only read the King James version of the Bible? No. Can God be limited or contained in one translation? I don't believe God can be limited in any way.

Did God command us to worship according to the 1979 Episcopal Book of Common Prayer? No. Did command people to worship according to any other denomination's book of worship? No.

You see there are God's laws and there are laws written by men (and women). The two are not the same.

What does God command?

In Exodus chapter 20, God gives us 10 Commandments.

1. Do not worship any other gods
2. Do not make any idols (not even American Idol?)
3. Do not misuse the Name of God
4. Keep the Sabbath holy
5. Honor your father and mother
6. Do not murder
7. Do not commit adultery
8. Do not steal
9. Do not lie
10. Do not covet

In the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, Jesus is asked, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” (Matthew 22:36). Jesus responds by saying the following, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment and the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. The Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40).

If one were to do what Jesus declares as the most important, then one would in fact be obeying the first four commandments which are about God and the following six commandments which are about one’s relationship with other people.

This is what God calls us to do.

Consider other places in scripture where God tells us what to do. Micah 6:8 states, “...what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

James 1 calls us to “be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves ...If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” James wants people to move beyond only hearing the word of God, but actually do God’s work, hold their tongue from further conflict, and care for widows and orphans.

Now we have looked at a few of the differences between rules of God and of people. Think about this the next time Christians are arguing about one thing or another.

Remember to pray for your church and for your leaders. Prayers for myself and for Prince of Peace are also greatly appreciated. Next week we will observe the anniversary of the September 11th attacks. Pray for your country and for our leaders.

Blessings be upon you,
Fr. Steve+