

Haven Newsletter

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To Be A Servant— Part II

Years ago a Christian singer had a wonderful song entitled "The Kingdom upside down". It was a brief attempt to describe how the Lord looks at the issue of service and leadership. Jesus himself put it this way "The kings of the gentiles lord it over them, and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors', but not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the least, and the leader as the servant... But I am among you as the one who serves." (Luke 22:25-27). Jesus truly does stand the world's values on its end. We in the church tend to still have the problem that the apostles had - who is the greatest preacher, scholar, writer, etc, etc? Our pride demands that we be lifted up, and it is this same pride which will drag us down time and time again. Servants have no way to really make sense out of a hierarchy among themselves. Can't you just see the galley slaves arguing over which side of the boat is most important? The right - no the left! How na-

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of reaching out and helping others. As I mentioned in the last newsletter, James refers to true religion as dealing with orphans and widows. Not that the list he gives is exhaustive, but it certainly is a great place to start. It is so hard to get excited over a ministry which "only" visits nursing homes, when there are Christian "empires" to build. It is easy to ignore the millions of orphans in the world, when the politics of the country need funding. It is almost incomprehensible to me how many billions of dollars the church has spent since 1980 on political campaigns and church buildings. Hmmm, let me think about this for a moment. The Apostle James says that true religion is about dealing with those who are hurting (a very common theme in the Old Testament as well). Well, then false religion must be described as *not* dealing with those who are hurting. Any ministry that pours its love out on bricks and TV political ads by definition is a false ministry.

Let's look at a great example from Micah chapter 6:6-7. The prophet says "With what shall I come to the Lord and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, in

that both of these are not part of him. They are removed from him. There is a space between what he offers and himself. It may hurt his wallet a bit, but it is not him. Then the bribes get serious. Now he contemplates offering thousands of rams and thousands of rivers of oil. No where does God ever ask for this, but the serious person does not let that interfere with the "buying" off of his guilt. This is a common phenomenon among practitioners of many religions, who at the end of day "get religion" and attempt to pay God off. For example, this is why many rich Muslims will make several "Hajj" pilgrimages, even though they are only required to make one. Notice that this bribe will really cost him in his wallet, but still he is secure in his safe place. All he has to do is give his "stuff" and God will be happy. But then it goes to the next level. His child is required - very common in many ancient religions but not so in the Hebrew faith. This one cuts closest of all, the "fruit" of himself is now required. To give a child to buy God off, this is surely enough. The problem is that none of this is what God had in mind, and this point illustrates greatly what the Lord means by service. The prophet responds to the bribes in verse

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thetic! Yet it is the kind of thing that humans do. We rank ourselves constantly - the pecking order. We do it at home, at work, in the church, at play and so on. All of this would probably be terribly amusing to the Lord, **except** that he values servant hood. He desires that we be in the business

ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my first born for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" The interesting thing here is the progression of the offer made by the individual. He starts with burnt offerings and yearling calves. Notice

proper response to the brides in verse 8, "He has told you, O man, what is good, what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God" Notice that the very thing the supposed penitent wanted to offer is not what God wanted.

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To be a Servant II, continued...

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The penitent offered everything he had, even his child, but he didn't offer himself. The Lord wanted *him*, not his possessions. God is not interested in our tithes and offerings - he wants us. If he gets us, our giving will follow accordingly. The Lord wants our very being, because the demands he makes require just that. We must "do justice, love kindness, walk humbly". I cannot pay someone to do that for me. I must walk that path. Giving of my money and other possessions is merely the beginning of service. True service, following the idea of "True religion", is found when one gives of ones very essence. To "do justice", especially in the Minor prophet sense, was to take care of widows, orphans, those cheated by the rulers and religious leaders. To "love kindness" requires empathy much deeper than we want to give. This is why the Good Samaritan story IS the description of loving the neighbor. Love has nothing to do with sentiment, or intentionality, but rather with service to the one in need. To "walk humbly" is the reasonable position for one who is a servant, valuing others more than themselves. It is a hard thing to do, and of course I am a hypocrite as soon as I say these words. Thank the Lord for his grace in these issues.

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of "spiritual exercises" Most commonly, these are mystical events through repetitive mindless chanting and other such drivel. Why not be "bulked" up through real spiritual exercise? How about do spiritual "sit-ups" by sitting up and paying attention to the innumerable people whom God would have us serve? Why not do spiritual "pushups" by getting involved long term with people, who have no one, such as orphans or widows, or people in nursing homes, or street people or people in mental institutions, etc? Why not build up the heart muscles by doing major "reps" of loving kindness, which is not a random act, but rather a systematic approach to a different and supernatural calling in life? When one serves those in need, the humility before God that is required comes in the realization that we too are needy. What a blessing to serve. How I wish I would have started earlier!

Why not give the best that we have, our "treasure" as it were, to the people that Jesus died and rose for, and give our "crumbs" to the politicians and buildings?

Book Note

Again I would encourage you to read this book. It is heartbreaking in a way but sometimes harsh medicine is good for the soul. The book is entitled "A Matter of



Basic Principles - Bill Gothard and the Christian Life". It is written by Don and Joy Veinot and Ron Henzel and published by 21st Century press. You can find it at the website for the Midwest Christian Outreach at www.midwestoutreach.org. Though again I know many of you respect Bill Gothard and were influenced greatly by his teachings, there are both personal and theological reasons to see him in a different way. Before you react, I would encourage you to read the book, check out the facts and then make your decision.

Non-Prophet Update

For this issues non-prophet update, let me update you on the latest Evangelical Theological Society meetings, from which I just returned this past week. Most distressing was the fact that a vote on the membership of John Sanders and Clark Pinnock, two

Matthew 25:31- 46 gives us a description of those who "truly" believe and of course, those who don't. Notice that all of the quantifiable acts - giving hungry people food, giving thirsty people water, hospitality to strangers, giving clothes, visiting prisoners, etc. are not measured or quantified in "spiritual" terms. Rather they are measured in real life, down and dirty ways that require a real human being to help out other real human beings. It is so sad that many who seek a deeper spiritual relationship with God these days, are seeking that in all sorts

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"openness" theologians, barely passed to submit the issue to the executive committee. To actually revoke their membership would take a two thirds vote, which at this point seems unlikely. This is so sad. The fact that they deny that God knows the future, argue that God has been mistaken numerous times and Pinnock now argues that the Father has a body, seems to be glossed over in favor of academic unity. We should just call it the Evangelical Talmudic Society and the name would be more appropriate. Is there no shame? Who needs a god who is a larger than life version of me??? More to come.