

This is episode 5 of our 'Journey' podcast series entitled 'Reasonable Service'.

- Sometimes, the only way to get people to see the light is to get them to see the dark. Today's episode can have the potential to be a sensitive topic, so I'll give you fair warning – listener discretion is advised. We're going to have a discussion on the traditional church. For many of us, our upbringing in the traditional church has served as the foundation of our moral compass, our sense of righteousness before God, and the hope of our Salvation. But there are problems in the traditional church model fundamentally contradicting what we know the Lord's Commandments to be. Let's dive in.
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Introduction

- A young man and his family are members of a dynamic and highly regarded church in their community; of which he and his wife have become ordained ministers.
- They are invited to take part in an evening of fellowship sponsored by their church and hosted at their pastor's house.
- This evening promised to be as enjoyable and edifying as many other similar evenings of fellowship; where ministry is given for the building and enrichment of the married couples of the church towards the strengthening of the Body of Christ.
- The young man and his family arrive and are greeted by the pastor's wife, and give warm hello's to everyone present as they make their way to the living room.
- Ministry commences with the teaching of principles of the Word of God, followed by discussion and engagement of ideas.
- Everyone feels the mutual sense of vitalization and inspiration resulting from the discussion.
- As the ministry portion of this evening comes to a close, the evening winds down into a more relaxed atmosphere.
- The young man gets up from his seat and goes to the kitchen area where several of the married men including the pastor are gathered together in light-hearted conversation.
- The light-hearted conversation then turns into light-hearted cackling with the entrance of the young man.
- The pastor clearly targets him with what was understood to be light-hearted jesting; as if to blatantly cast him jokingly as an inept father.
- The young man plays along as a good sport, and brushes off the apparent ridicule; but the jesting continues and climaxes with the statement made by the pastor to the young man: "I'll have to put both you and your son over my knee..."
- Swallowing what the young man believes to be an assault on his manhood while standing there before his peers, he feels a piercing sense of emasculation and contempt; and responds with a pointed finger and an accompanying statement to satisfy the moment: "the only one to put my son over his knee is me..."
- With that, the young man walks out the room, and the pastor and the others seem to simply brush off the exchange and dismiss it as light hearted cackling; while the young man instead holds on to his anger and contempt, allowing it to fester into resentment.
- A few days later just so happened to be Saturday morning leadership training at the church hosted by the pastor; of which the young man was a part.
- Still holding on to his resentment, the young man attends the meeting.
- Up until the very end, he was able to suppress his resentment and wear the false face of congeniality; until a faithful moment while he and his 6 year old son stood at the exit door just a few feet away from the pastor.
- With excitement and expectation, his son asks the young man "can I go to the pastor's house today"?
- Hearing this, the pastor grins as if to say "sure it's ok"; but at the same time, the young man seems to no longer be able to contain his resentment from a few nights prior, and explodes with "No, you're not going to his house today".
- The pastor is visually taken aback by his exacerbated response; but seeing this, the young man proceeds to gather his family, heads to his car, and leaves.
- Early the following morning, the young man gets settled into his routine functions in ministry at his church for the Sunday morning worship service.
- The service progresses as normal and the pastor gets up to preach the message for the day.

- Interestingly enough, the pastor preaches a message about the need for there to be confession to one another of our faults; and in particular, if a person has an 'ought' against his brother, then he must first go to that brother he has an 'ought' against and be reconciled before he gives any gift to God.
- Hearing this greatly distressed the young man.
- He reasoned in himself, "Here I am performing my gift of ministry to God, but now I have to stop and go to the pastor and be reconciled? Wasn't I the one that was offended? How is it that this requirement to be reconciled is upon me?"
- As the service went on, the pastor seemed to press the matter further with the giving of an appeal to all who may have an 'ought' with their brother to go to them and afterwards come to the alter to be reconciled before God.
- Again, this greatly distressed the young man. He reasoned within himself "How can I go to the pastor in front of all these people? Maybe I'll wait until after the service is over".
- So the young man locked down, and held to his function in ministry.
- Moments later, the pastor calls the young man out from his function in ministry, and in front of the entire congregation, speaks into his ear, "step down from your position, kneel at the alter and pray".
- The young man is perplexed, but kneels down and prays.
- Filled with the frustration and embarrassment of the ordeal, he tries to find words to pray to God.
- Next, he feels someone's hands lay upon his head and hears the pastor openly give instructions "pray that that spirit is cast out".
- Finally after the conclusion of the alter call, during the transition to the final phase of the church service, the pastor publicly instructs the young man to sit elsewhere in the congregation, effectively removing him from his function in ministry.
- Towards the end of the service, the young man finally feels the need to at least attempt to obtain the reconciliation that was preached about during the service between himself and the pastor.
- So after the dismissal, he goes to him and expresses that indeed he was offended earlier in the week at the jesting and joking to others about his ineptitude as a father; which caused him to hold onto resentment and bitterness towards him.
- The young man then apologized to the pastor for holding on to that resentment.
- Hearing this, the pastor says "since you publically held onto resentment, then you should publically apologize."
- So without question, the young man takes a microphone, gets the people's attention, and issues a public apology before the church for holding onto an offense towards the pastor.
- Everyone including the pastor seems to listen and graciously accept this plea, and the young man finally feels that he has been reconciled.
- Several months later, the young man happens upon that one verse in the Bible – the verse in which Christ refers to a person having an 'ought' with his brother.
- At that moment, Matthew 5:23-24 immediately becomes etched into his memory, commanding the momentary flashback of what he considers to have been a traumatic experience.
- Fighting the emotions of reliving the experience, he reads the words of the scripture... and stops, frozen in place.
- He backs up and reads again... and reads again... and again.
- The startling discovery is undeniable: the words of the preacher DON'T MATCH the words of Christ.
- Focusing on verse 23 he sees clearly that Christ places the burden of being reconciled on the person who knows his brother has an 'ought' against him; opposed to the one who has the 'ought' with his brother.
- The young man reasons within himself:
"How could a scripture so well-known have been so easily overlooked?"

"Surely, the pastor should have known this."

"Why did he force me to apologize?"

"Wasn't it his duty to seek reconciliation with me?"

"In any event, how is it that there was any need one way or the other for there to be a public display?"

"Even if I was responsible, Christ never stipulated that I be subject to open humiliation, disparagement and demotion."

"One way or the other, Christ never stipulated that the church institution be made publicly aware of the personal reconciliation between two brothers."

Dear friends, it's time for us to ask some hard questions about the institution we know today as the traditional church.

- For many of us, the institution of the traditional church commands great authority in our lives.
- But has that authority ever been abused by the institution?
- For many of us, the institution of the traditional church has served as the foundation for the hope of our salvation.
- But has that hope for salvation ever been obfuscated by the inclusion of requiring acknowledgement of and service to the institution?
- For many of us, the institution of the traditional church has been a source of much needed benevolence in terms of financial support and family enrichment.
- But has that much needed benevolence ever been leveraged by the institution to appeal to the person's need to pay that received benevolence forward with, say, greater servitude or emotional devotion to the pastor?
- For many of us, the institution of the traditional church has provided a strong sense of belonging to a community of like-minded individuals, answering our needs for emotional wellbeing.
- But has that sense of belonging ever been misinterpreted as being available only on the basis of validation by the institution; that is, to those who are favorably recognized and given acceptance?
- For many of us, the institution of the traditional church has served as the one place that we believe our God-given purpose for living is actively being fulfilled, and God is pleased with our service to Him in our functions in the institution.
- But has that need of ours to fulfill God's purpose in the church ever been leveraged by the institution; dangling it before us as a carrot on a string? How many times has the promise of stripping someone of an assigned purpose been used to keep people in line?
- For many of us, the institution of the church has served as our moral compass and sense of righteousness before God.
- But is there potential for conflict between religiously held traditions within the institution and the keeping of God's commandments?
- And here's the ultimate question: Can the institution itself get its own way; having the intention to lift members to a higher level of righteousness, but requiring them to place undue importance in itself?
- As in the opening anecdotal story, the young man had a valid point.
- The argument could be made that there was really no practical use for making his need to be reconciled to his brother public knowledge.
- And herein lies the problem.
- When people mention that famous phrase 'church hurt', they're usually referring to the weight of the institution behind the pain; opposed to pain from a single member in the institution.
- It's conceivable that there are other issues involved that would warrant the institution placing itself as the central theme in person's spiritual duties.
- Perhaps there are special interests. Perhaps there's an attempt for it to procure its own existence.
- But one thing is for certain: Our Lord Jesus Christ is categorically opposed to anyone receiving public recognition for the performance of spiritual duties; as this leads to hypocrisy (see Matt 6:5-6 for reference).
- And the sad fact is, the institution throwing its weight around in this regard has been a staple in the institution of our traditional church.

Let's clear up the misconceptions by examining the commandments.

- In the Holy Scriptures, Jesus Christ, or by His Hebrew-given name Yashua Ha Mashiach, is challenged by the Pharisees to answer which of the commandments is the greatest.
- When He answered, He gave a rather unexpected authoritative explanation of how to see keeping the commandments.
- The exchange is recorded Matthew 22:37-40 for your reference, but is summarized as follows.
- Jesus said the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, and mind.
- Further, the second is similar in that you are to love your neighbor as yourself.
- Further still, all the law and the prophets hang on these two.
- First, let's investigate the first commandment – 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and mind'.
- Notice His use of both words 'first' and 'greatest'.
- It is not necessary to use both the terms 'first' and 'greatest' in simply answering the Pharisee's question. For this, either the word 'first' or the word 'great' would suffice.
- However, He goes through the trouble of specifying both terms 'first' and 'greatest' because He is indicating authority.
- There's a well-known paradigm in theology known as the Principle of First Mention, and it's this principle that Jesus is referring to.
- The general concept is, precedent is set by way of sequence. So truth principles that are mentioned FIRST in sequence are given the weightiest or most critical importance as a matter of necessity, and set the tone for supporting truth principles.
- So, He uses the word 'first' obviously to specify sequence, and uses the word 'great' to specify magnitude.
- But let's think about this for a moment: 'Thou Shalt Love the Lord God with all thy heart, soul, and mind' is not part of The 10 Commandments; and yet according to Christ, it's first in sequence, and greatest in magnitude.
- So the best way to reconcile this is to realize that the two commandments given by Christ must transcend The 10 Commandments; and in addition transcend all the recorded law and the prophets of the Old Testament.
- Adam was never given The 10 Commandments in the Garden of Eden, but the commandments he was given were in association with his relationship with God; as described by Him walking with Adam in the cool of the evening. This can be characterized as a covenant relationship.
- Noah was never given The 10 Commandments, but the commandments he was given were in association with his relationship with God; as described in scripture that he walked with God; in return God made a covenant with him.
- Abraham was never given 10 Commandments, but the commandments he was given were in association with his relationship with God; as described in scripture that he was a friend of God; and in return God made a covenant with him.
- And The 10 Commandments that were given to Moses were done so in conjunction with the covenant God made with him and the children of Israel.
- So based on this clear pattern, we can deduce that the 'first' and 'great' commandment is referring to Covenant.
- Secondly, let's look at the second commandment – 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'.
- This obviously refers to the 'golden rule' which has everything to do with morality.

- So to summarize, according to Christ, it is impossible to keep any of the commandments recorded in scripture without viewing them through the lens of Covenant with God and the preserving of morality.
- So let's reconcile this with the institution of the traditional church.
- The unfortunate truth is, yes it tends to place undue importance on itself; to the degree of breaking the commandments.
- This is a big deal.
- And if we take an honest look at the institution through the lens of the second commandment, we can see clearly that loving our neighbor as ourselves has taken a back seat to regard for the institution.
- We see clearly that the institution has perhaps unintentionally created a breeding ground for pitting members against each other through a rewards-based system of recognition.
- We see clearly that it has the potential to confuse member's aspirations to please God with the aspiration to obtain validation and recognition by the institution.
- And, as a result, we can see clearly that the institution has become a fraternity-like system of rewards; placing itself above the Lord's commandment of simply loving our neighbor as ourselves.