

November 21, 2008 Are You "Democratic"? Is God?

The question, "Are you democratic?" isn't intended in the political sense. It's really our way to ask you to closely examine your thinking and response processes. If you live in the United States you've been raised in a democracy. But we'd bet that it's never occurred to you that living in a democracy could be hazardous to your faith! Does this shock you? Well, what we mean is this: Unlike kingdoms or dictatorships, democracies allow you the discretionary freedom to **pick** and **choose**.

Now consider your call as one who loves and follows Lord Jesus, a life of immediate obedience to the One in whom you trust. His indwelling Spirit stirs your will to obey and empowers you to follow through (see Philippians 2:13). A "democratic" way of life, on the other hand, caters to personal choices that satisfy your own tastes and preferences. For example, you get to elect the officials who satisfy your preferences. But it's this perceived 'freedom' to pick and choose that may be one of the greatest hindrances to both you **living repentantly** and **serving our Lord's purposes in the Kingdom of God**.

You don't get too far into the scriptural text before you realize that our God has spoken commands, laws and statutes which He demands that His people obey without hesitation! And don't deceive yourself into thinking that His commands are confined to the Older Testament and the Jewish people. His loving freedoms and boundaries within the Newer Testament consist of 1,050 commands! The God who has by grace filled those who love and follow His Son has made clear how that loving response is to be lived out. To know His ways is to obey them as did even Abel and Enoch: with a heart that loves to please our heavenly Father (Hebrews 11:4,5). Sadly, though, responsive obedience that follows through immediately is foreign to so many democratic-minded "Christians" in the United States. The motto of much of western Christendom is this: **obedience is based on how you feel about it**.

There is a certain category of followers of Jesus, however, who in general aren't in bondage to feelings-based obedience — those who have spent time in the military, especially if they've served in wartime. These men and women know what it is to obey orders without hesitation, and that obedience carries over in their lives as "soldiers for Christ". When people who've had military experience read the account of the Centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant (Matthew 8:5-10), they readily understand why Jesus proclaimed, **"I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great trust."** Obedience and trust in God are intertwined for those who love their Lord. As with Paul's designation of "soldier" to Timothy, Epaphroditus and Archippus, you can't have one without the other.

Regardless of whether you've served in the military or not, don't allow a "democratic mindset" to sully your obedient response to our Lord. Have you really internalized that when you use the word **"Lord"**, you're proclaiming that He has absolute dominion over you? As LORD, He has the right to command you as His beloved bondservant, and your only acceptable response before Him is to immediately obey. (Out of His great heart of mercy, when we stumble and confess, agreeing with the Spirit that we've sinned and purposing to turn from it, then He does so graciously forgive and cleanse us. But

resistance to obey really is SIN from His perspective, and needs to be dealt with accordingly through our repentance!)

Remember, nowhere in His Word is God represented as existing to meet our desires. Jesus is a righteous King who has the privilege to command obedience in the lives of His beloved even as He so graciously empowers us to do so through His abiding Spirit. It's through our loving, obedient trust that He works in and through us to fulfill His Kingdom purposes.

Are You Immediately Obedient To Our Lord's Commands? Or, Are You A Democratic Thinker?

Forgiving Others: A Kingdom Requirement

A most blatant area in which democratic thinking deceives those who call themselves "Christian" into thinking they're OK with God involves **bitterness** and **unforgiveness**. Christian counseling in general takes a psychological view about forgiving others. In other words, whether you choose to forgive someone is based on how you feel about it and whether you think they deserve it. Kingdom obedience, however, calls you through the Spirit to forgive regardless of how you feel. When you purpose out of your trusting obedience to your Lord to forgive, then HE brings about the healing for whatever offense has hurt you.

The sin of ongoing unforgiveness has pointed countless thousands within Christendom toward the path to hell. What arrogant pride to think that YOU are forgiven a multitude of sins that you've willfully committed against a holy and righteous God when you are setting yourself up like God to WITHHOLD forgiveness from another person! That's like saying you've only committed a "mote" of sin against God when some other person (from your point of view) has committed a "log" of offense against you. Can you recognize how arrogant and ungrateful your unforgiveness is? Forgiving others is one of our Father's stipulations for walking in Covenant union with us: ***"If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"*** (Matthew 6:15). If you aren't forgiven by our Father, how can you expect to enter His Presence in heaven? You can't!!!

The most common type of unforgiveness that we've encountered as we've been in contact with thousands over the years is the bitterness they hold against one or both parents. This prideful form of unforgiveness is pandemic among those who call themselves "Christian". And tragically, unforgiveness toward parents is the number one besetting sin among clergy, so you can be sure that it's a topic that's not being addressed to their congregations! Just think: If leadership made sure they themselves were free from unforgiveness, what impact they could make on those whom they could then exhort and admonish in Christ! Forgiveness in loving obedience to our Lord would become non-optional, calling for those who gather in Jesus' name to forgive their parents (and others) or face excommunication so that tolerated sin would not defile the spiritual family. Don't you think that if that occurred, there would be many more authentic testimonies of salvation among those who think they're "Christian" but intentionally violate Christ's commands? Keep in mind that it's inside church walls that people need to be saved as well as outside!

Let's consider another far-reaching command from our all-wise Father who establishes commands for His purposes on behalf of those He calls out as His own. The directive to

honor parents is repeated at least 8 times in the Scriptures. As with all of the "holy, righteous and good" commands of our God (Romans 7:12), this one is for our benefit and even promises a blessing as we obey it! ***"Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth"*** (Ephesians 6:2,3).

Are you inadvertently hindering someone else's obedience to this fruitful command? You are if you listen to someone's embittered tale about their parent(s) and commiserate with their bitterness, especially if you've been let down by your own parents and refused to forgive them. No matter how well-meaning you think you are, in God's sight you are acting as **Satan's emissary** to keep that person from heaven. You're not only refusing to confront them with their sinful unforgiveness, you're tacitly encouraging them to continue in it!

Forgiveness is one of the keys to authentic salvation (and we stress authentic because so many have given way to a counterfeit gospel in which they've acknowledged particular verses, repeated a prayer, and then been declared "saved" — yet are living in a way that brings down the name of Jesus). If you entertain slander against someone's parents when you're only hearing one-sided information, you're steering them away from a heavenly welcome and encouraging them to press on in pride — a condition that our Father declares He opposes (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). Doesn't that grieve you?? Enough to confront the bitter so that they might respond in obedience to the Spirit and repent?

- **If you're holding on to bitterness (unforgiveness) toward anyone, forgive them because you are commanded to by a holy Lord who will forgive you.**
- **Next, contact that person and ask forgiveness for your sinful attitude toward them that has kept you from being a blessing to them. (You're commanded to forgive them in your heart, but you're asking them for forgiveness for your unloving attitude.)**
- **And, continue to pray for God's blessing on them.**
- **As you walk in this biblical process of obedient trust, our Lord Jesus will heal your emotions.**

Using Your Discretionary Time For Kingdom Purposes

- How are you using your time to serve the Lord you love?
- Would He commend you or rebuke you?

In our Lord's sight, even the time we're each allotted every day is purposeful for His use.

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10); ***"Make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil"*** (Ephesians 5:16).

We prepared a chart in our **Teaching E-mail 18. Our Gift To You** (December 13, 2005) to help you see how you render account to God in terms of using your time effectively. To return to our initial topic, democracies provide for a greater amount of discretion, both in time and opportunity, for you to choose what you want to do. Pleasure and comfort are high among most people's priorities, even in these times of economic stress. You want to maintain a certain level of comfort and enjoy a certain amount of personal recreational time. Most even within western Christendom put their own self-satisfaction first, while the interests of our Lord are secondary.

Discretionary time is that portion of your day when you have a chance to choose what you want to do. Included in this time might be reading, watching TV, taking a walk or nap, Bible study, sports, etc. How do you use your discretionary time? Is it to directly bless others, such as through intercessory prayer, calling someone to encourage them, visiting widows, volunteering in some way to help others? Or do you use it as "Bless Me Time", choosing to do something solely for yourself without concern for others? Please fill in the chart so that you can see how Kingdom-minded you are in the use of your time. Then prayerfully seek our Lord's input for ways in which you could bless others and bring joy to them, yourself, and your God.

Using Your Income and Wealth For Kingdom Purposes

"This is my money!" This attitude is the heart refrain of idolatry of so many within western Christendom. This self-indulgent mindset is your rationalization to buy things that are commensurate with your income (and even beyond. Witness the average \$10,000 credit card debt of every person in the US.) The wealthier you are, the more expensive the material possessions you're able to justify. And you don't have to be among the "very rich" to do this! It's a personal frame of reference that stirs you to keep reaching for more and better and newer.

You probably don't see yourself as an "idolater", someone in a category whom our Lord must chastise according to His righteous character. That's why all those warnings and examples permeate the Hebrew Scripture — so we'll learn from them and walk instead in obedient trust rather than in compromised self-service (1 Corinthians 10:6,11!)

Our God commands you to be a **steward** over what you have, not an **owner**. He expects you to hold your wealth with open hands, to be used as our Lord Jesus directs. The world teaches and models otherwise: **"I made this money, so I can use it as I want"** (Religious compromise whispers that if you give your 10% tithe, the rest is YOURS. Not so! It ALL comes from the hand of the Gracious Provider to be used as HE wills it!)

Even your job has been given you by the Sovereign Father Who opens and closes doors according to His good will and purpose. Therefore this warning from ancient days addresses the inner pride of each of us if we think we're the ones who provided whatever resources we have: ***"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today"***(Deuteronomy 8:17,18). It is God who enables you to acquire resources — sometimes in very creative ways! It is He who wants to direct you how to effectively use a portion of what He's given you to advance His Kingdom.

In order to do this you need open hands and a heart that responds to His prompting. Putting your trust in your savings, your ability to work, even your confidence that YOU are safe from the economic woes of others is idolatry — a spiritually adulterous love that's the root of all kinds of evil. That road only leads downhill as far as your walk in Jesus goes. The greed behind that love can tempt you to stray from your faith, piercing yourself through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:10).

If you find that you fear what is happening in this economy, it's because you refused to be a steward over the wealth the Lord has given you (and compared to 95% of the world, each of us is wealthy!). You were **stingy** with that with which He entrusted you as

a steward, and He is treating you just as He forewarned: **"A stingy man is eager to get rich and is unaware that poverty awaits him"** (Proverbs 28:22). Don't cling to that which you can see and touch. It's fleeting anyway, and the tighter you try to hold onto it, the darker your spirit will grow. **"The lamp of your body is the eye. When you have a 'good eye,' [that is, when you are generous,] your whole body is full of light; but when you have an 'evil eye,' [when you are stingy,] your body is full of darkness"** (Luke 11:34; see also James 2:14-26, 1 John 3:17).

Take a close inventory of all that you own. Was it our Lord's intent that you lavish yourself with that which He entrusted you? Or, were those purchases induced because your fleshly self was whispering, "I deserve this. I work hard. This is MINE!"

If you have been open handed with your wealth as a loving and obedient steward in the Kingdom, you have no need to fear. If you've remained free from the love of your money, our Lord's sustaining Presence is all you need according to His wonderful promises: **"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"** (Hebrews 13:5b).

Call to mind again this truth that emphasizes the unity and fellowship of those who follow Lord Jesus with all their heart, soul, mind and strength — particularly those who have little besides their life-sustaining trust in God's faithfulness:

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10)

Before You Purchase Your 'Wants', Give To Someone Else's Needs

Around the world, family members of those who've been martyred for their loving trust in Lord Jesus live in dreadful persecution and poverty. Most are not able to gain or keep jobs because of that trust. Some are sold into slavery, abused and violated. **Voice of the Martyrs** has set up a "Families of the Martyrs Fund" to provide greatly needed food and clothing, Bibles, and job training equipment such as sewing machines to encourage and strengthen and comfort our faithful family in Jesus. This day, before you even think of indulging yourself or those who have so little need for what you'd normally buy, please call **VOM** at **1-800-747-0085** and ask how to share a gift with the Families of Martyrs. Please, help someone in need as if you yourself or a beloved family member were suffering for His Name.

If you yearn to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, you can't live "democratically", picking and choosing which parts of His Word you'll obey and which you'll disregard. That is NOT the pathway to a heavenly welcome, but a counterfeit that straddles the world. Consider this truth with an awesome regard for Who He is: **If our Lord isn't LORD of you and what you do, He isn't Lord AT ALL for you.** Is your reluctance to obey Him with a heart of obedient trust the picture of Him that you want to present to those around you? Is that the picture you want HIM to see?

Please, don't mingle democracy with loving, trusting obedience.

Mike & Sue