

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

"...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE..." ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

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THE PROBLEM WITH TOO MUCH CONSERVATISM

By Brady Cook

Let me preface everything I'm about to say with this bold statement: I am absolutely a religious conservative. In saying that, I mean that I am beholden to the traditions found within the pages of the Bible because they are God-inspired and authoritative in every way. I believe that we should live and move and think in the way the Bible tells us to, and follow the traditions as they were handed down by the Apostles (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Pet. 4:11).

That being said, it is possible, in a fit of hyper-zealousness, to move past the God-approved traditions found in the Bible, and blow full on in to a practice of self-exaltation. We manufacture a more stringent set of beliefs in a desire to please God, and end up binding those items on people because we believe that "that's what God would want us to do." In case that sounds familiar, that attitude is exactly what Jesus condemned the Pharisees for (Mark 7:1-8).

Hyper-conservatism tends to view Christianity in one-direction; that is, it looks at holiness as ground zero, and anything that stems off of that is moving farther away from God and closer towards unGodliness. In reality, Christianity is a spectrum, with God in the middle, and error falling either too far to the left, or too far to the right. It's for this reason that Moses stressed the importance of "not

turning aside to the right or to the left” (Deut. 5:32)—a concept repeated in Revelation 22:18-19, when John commanded us not to **“take away”** or **“add to”** the Book that was written.

The argument is not to simply ignore Biblical rules or fundamentalism of any kind; if anything, holding fast to God’s inspired Word is the only argument I’m making. The point is to not create a set of rules where God has not made any, in an effort to “be more religious-er.”

I believe these errors come about honestly. For instance, Scripture teaches us that the early Christians met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). The timing of that, on that specific day, is left open to individual groups of Christians to decide, whether morning, noon, or as close to midnight as humanly possible. As long as that principle is fulfilled, the individual time can vary from church to church.

What would happen though, if someone made the argument: “We worship for two hours at the crack of dawn, and anyone that doesn’t just doesn’t love God!” Hopefully we would recommend the individual to psychiatric training, but a possible response from others could be: “Well, we worship from 6PM to 11PM on Sunday; take that!” The snowball can continue from there into argument ad nauseam, but what eventually occurs is a self-righteous battle of holiness, in which the only victor is ego, and the ultimate loser is the well-meaning Christian.

Most of us want to serve God, and if you’re reading this, I assume you fall into that category. But that pursuit can be stunted when those who desire to create holiness for themselves begin to bind their own stipulations on others, essentially setting themselves up as judge, jury, and

executioner of God's decrees. Unfortunately, that role is not yours to take; it's been occupied by Jehovah since the creation of the world. And you and I are not Him.

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“I AM PRAYING FOR YOU”

By Heath Rogers

A common theme in Paul's letters is his reminder that he was praying for people. Phrases like **“making mention of you always,”** **“every prayer,”** and **“without ceasing”** are made regarding both congregations and individuals (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:4; Col. 1:9; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:3; Philemon 4).

Such words would have brought great comfort and strength to these Christians. However, it was more than Paul's sincere intention to pray for them that brought comfort. It was the assurance that actual prayers were being offered to God on their behalf. They knew that when Paul said he was praying for them that he really was praying for them.

Many Christians claim to be praying for individuals today. Perhaps a need is made know through a personal conversation, a request posted on social media, or a public response to an invitation. Our immediate response is to say, “I am praying for you,” but are we? Are we following through on the promise, or just speaking the words to provide immediate comfort?

It is the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous person that avails much (James 5:16), not the good intentions or a mere promise to offer such prayers. It is sometimes hard to remember every promise we have made, but as Christians

we need to be people of our word. If we say, “I am praying for you,” we need to do it.

An older preacher named Louis Sharp once told me that he carried a list of members who needed his prayers. He would add and remove names from the list throughout the week. When it came time for him to pray, he would refer to the list to make sure he remembered these individuals. Brother Sharp has passed on to his reward, but perhaps we can benefit from following his example. We should try making a list of those who need our prayers, either in a little notebook or perhaps on our smartphone. Such a practice can help us if we are having a problem with the “follow through” on our promises to remember people in our prayers.

NOTES: _____

AM LESSON:
4 Ways to Make Sure You
Never Grow Spiritually

PM LESSON:
Spirit vs. Flesh
(Galatians 5:13-26)

**“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)**