

August 21, 2022

The View

“Sirs, we wish to see Jesus.” — John 12:21

Welcome Visitors

Our goal at the Folsom church of Christ is to do everything according to God’s word, including respecting its silence.

We are not a denomination, not part of anything larger than this local church; we have no earthly “headquarters.”

The five elders oversee this church and, ultimately, we answer only to Christ. The comments you hear today are primarily for the benefit of our own members, as we examine Scripture and seek to be built up in our faith in Christ. If you don’t understand something, please do not hesitate to ask the preacher or one of the elders. We welcome and appreciate your comments and questions on any issue and especially if you see or hear anything that you feel does not correspond to God’s word. We are here to serve; please help us do that.

**Please fill out a visitor’s card and put it in the collection plate when is passed.
We do not solicit donations from visitors. See page 4 for more information.**

Schedule

The Lord’s Day

9:30 AM Bible Classes

Auditorium: “Wisdom from Above”

Room 15/16: Old Testament Characters & Their Relationships)

Room 12: Young Adult Class: Proverbs

10:30 AM: Assembly

Preaching Today: David Posey

Romans 3 — “From Guilt to Grace”

Livestream at 10:30 <https://tinyurl.com/5f2cbm3y>

Bible Class @ 5 PM — Praying the Psalms (Auditorium)

High School Class, 5 PM @ David & Christie Posey’s home

Middle school class: monthly (contact Dan Stegall at 818-209-9810)

There are several on-going Bible classes in the homes of members. Check with David Posey or one of the other elders if you would like to join one of those classes.

Wednesday 7 PM @ Building

Bible classes for all ages

Auditorium: Wisdom from Above

Room 15/16: Old Testament Characters: Relationships

Room 12: Young Adults Class

Church: What's Important?

BY ROGER SHOUSE

“Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”

Revelation 2:15

This article is a timely warning for everyone – not just “young people.” In fact, some earnest young people are starting to complain about the “feelings-first” approach in preaching and teaching. I’m aware of a few, attending a church in another state, who feel they are not hearing much on “doctrinal matters.” Roger Shouse mentions some of those below, in the first paragraph on page 3. It’s not that feelings don’t matter but our faith is based on facts – feelings follow.

The verse above centers on the church at Pergamum. The hood was raised and the Lord was revealing some deep, deep troubles that would change the direction and even the future of that church. Just nine verses before, the church at Ephesus was praised for hating the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. God hated that false teaching. But here, the church at Pergamum was embracing and accepting that very doctrine. They were accepting what God hated. There are a series of lessons that we ought to see here:

First, each congregation is independent and separate. How well this is illustrated with the Nicolaitan doctrine. One church hated it and another church held to it. There are lots of ideas and theories about what the doctrine of the Nicolaitans was, many lean heavily towards an early form of gnosticism. Whatever it was, the Lord hated it. The Ephesians hated it. But not the folks at the Pergamum church. They loved it.

We see right here that the organizational system of God allows each congregation to determine what they will practice and accept. There is no hierarchy, governing board, disciplinary council, or organization that keeps every congregation on the same page, going the same way. I have a friend who owns a Chick-Fil-A store. He cannot fry you a hamburger and sell it to you at his store. Corporate won’t allow that. His store must follow the guidelines of the corporation or else he could lose the store. Congregations are not a franchise of some larger corporate structure. Our only bylaws are the New Testament.

This means each congregation must decide for themselves how closely and how accurately they want to follow the Bible. Some do a great job with this. Others are a bit loose on some things and still others, haven’t been close in decades. A name on a sign doesn’t mean much. What matters is how close and serious they are about following the N.T. pattern.

Second, why would some hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans if the Lord hated it. That’s a great question. We are not told why. But, the same could be asked today of some of us.

Why do we hold to some things that are very questionable, if not plainly out of line with the Scriptures? It may be that what is taught is comforting and allows us to keep one foot in the world. It may be that the one teaching it is someone very impressive and such a piper that we are under his spell and would not question anything that he says. There is a lot of strange things being said today and much too often we give someone a pass because “he is one of us.” And, that’s the greatest danger. Rather than searching the Scriptures as we ought

“Rather than searching the Scriptures as we ought to, we listen to the charisma of a slick and smooth speaker and before long we’ve taken one or two steps away from the Scriptures. There is a lot of emphasis upon feelings today. Feeling your body tingle as you pray, hearing God speak in your ear, seeing signs that God has shown you, these kind of statements are coming not from the world, but our own brethren, and worse, some are smiling, agreeing and accepting these twisted thoughts.”

to, we listen to the charisma of a slick and smooth speaker and before long we’ve taken one or two steps away from the Scriptures. There is a lot of emphasis upon feelings today. Feeling your body tingle as you pray, hearing God speak in your ear, seeing signs that God has shown you, these kind of statements are coming not from the world, but our own brethren, and worse, some are smiling, agreeing and accepting these twisted thoughts. A few verses taken out of context are sprinkled on top to give the appearance that this is what the Bible teaches. Does God answer your prayers by sending a tingling sensation in your body? Could you prove that Biblically?

Why do some hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans? Simply because they have allowed themselves to be swayed by a slick salesman and they haven’t searched the Scriptures as they ought to.

Third, the wisdom of God allows opposite churches to exist. Ephesus hated the Nicolaitan doctrine. Pergamum held to the Nicolaitan doctrine. If there was some super structure over all the congregations and all the congregations had to toe the line with what the official board or headquarters said, then corruption at the top would corrupt all the churches. Not God’s way. If you want to hold to the Nicolaitan doctrine you can, but you won’t be right with God, and you won’t be right with God’s people.

So this tells us that I need to get into the depth of what a church is practicing before I throw my allegiance in with them. Much too often, a family just heads to the closest church building to their home. The people are friendly. Worship seems ok. But are they holding to Nicolaitan doctrine? Serious questions and investigation needs to take place before one makes the final decision.

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Why does this matter? If I can worship there and the people are nice, isn't that all that matters? Is it? Does it matter what we teach? What about doctrine? What about Nicolaitan teachings? What about the Holy Spirit? What about grace? What about salvation? What about worship? What about divorce? What about fellowship? What about closeness to God's word? Does it matter? Is it ok to hold to something that God hates? It ought to matter to us.

Jesus didn't give Pergamum a pass on the Nicolaitan doctrine. They were told to repent or else I'm coming and making war. Serious words for a serious problem. It does matter. It should matter.

It's time for shepherds who lead God's people and the faithful of God to understand that a smiling face, a charismatic presentation, and likable personality, may be nothing more than someone selling poison right before our eyes. Someone was teaching Nicolaitan doctrine to Pergamum. And, he was so good that the church was accepting it and embracing it. A piper then and piper today.

Hating the Nicolaitan doctrine or holding to it? Are we willing to draw lines in the sand and declare that we stand with God? It's time to think about these things. Growing crowds. Sizable followings. Enthusiastic responses does not make Nicolaitan doctrine right. It doesn't mean God looks the other way.

The legendary Texas preacher, J.D. Tant, ended many of his articles in the early 1900's with the line, "we are drifting."

Are we?

Romans Commentary: Romans 3:21-31

God's Plan to Save Us

Paul asserts that God's righteousness (his plan to save us) is revealed "apart from law" (v. 21). This means that those who are declared righteous ("justified") will not be judged on how perfectly we kept the law. Thank God for that! A righteousness based on "law" requires perfect performance of the law because there is no provision for forgiveness inherent in law. Law's only purpose it to provide a standard of conduct that we must "keep" to be right with God. Failure to perfectly perform it results in sin and spiritual death (cf. 4:15). God righteousness (his plan to save us) is "apart from law," but the Law and Prophets looked forward to the coming of Christ and his kingdom (cf. Galatians 3:15-29).

In Romans 3:23, Paul makes the point he's made before (see 3:10ff) that all have sinned, without exception. Here, he adds "and fall short of the glory of God." Paul is implying that the only way to be truly "good" is to be as good as God (cf. Matthew 19:17). Anything less makes me a sinner.

Since I can never attain to the moral glory of God, I'm in a predicament of my own making; we all are. However, God has provided a remedy — the free gift of salvation (v. 24; see 6:23b). How can it be free? It's free to us because Christ paid the cost on the cross. "He has borne our griefs and carried out sorrows...pierced for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:4-5). That's pure grace. When we put our faith in that action of God in Christ, that, not perfect performance of God's law, gives us access to God's plan for our salvation (Romans 5:1-2 sums it up nicely).

This gift of grace was obtained by Christ "with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Paul puts it this way in Romans 3:25: "God put [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." The word "propitiation" (Greek, *hilastērion*) recalls the mercy-seat (same word in Hebrews 9:5) where the blood of animals was sprinkled. The mercy seat could be called the "propitiatory" (see Leviticus 16:13-15). "Propitiation" satisfies the wrath of God that "has been revealed" (see 1:18). Jesus Christ, in his death on the cross, became our "mercy seat" (propitiation) once and for all.

The sacrifices under the Old Testament were effective to "forgive" sins (see Leviticus 19:22, etc.) but those sacrifices had to be repeated over and over (see Hebrews 10:1-4). It is only when Christ died on the cross, and became the propitiation (mercy seat) for our sins, that all of those who were faithful to God under the first covenant were forgiven (see Hebrews 9:15). That's why Paul says

God "passed over former sins." Full forgiveness depended on the shed blood of Christ — the blood of bulls and goats could not fully satisfy the wrath of God (Hebrews 10:4); only Christ's blood could do that. When Christ came, all the faithful in the Old Testament were "grandfathered" in (Hebrews 9:15).

But how could God save sinners and still be perfectly just? Romans 3:26 explains that God sent Christ to the cross "...so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." God never arbitrarily lets a sinner "off the hook." Every sinner who is forgiven, from Adam to now, is forgiven in Christ, or he's not forgiven. Why? Because God is perfectly just; therefore, the sinner must be judged. For God to be "just," a death had to occur before sinners could be saved (see Hebrews 9:15). We've all sinned, but Christ paid for our sins on the cross (that's grace). When we put all of our hope and trust in the cross, we will be saved. We are "justified" (declared "not guilty") by our faith. We are legally guilty of sin but God pronounces us "not guilty" (justifies us) — if we put our faith in Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 4:22-25).

Thus God is perfectly just even though he justifies sinners. We see God's love in the cross, but also his justice (cf. Acts 2:23). No one can charge that God is "all mercy, but no wrath," or "all wrath and no mercy." Both are active in the cross of Christ.

So, Paul says, since we have not perfectly performed the works of the law, we have no room to boast. Any "boasting" must be in the work of Christ on our behalf (see Galatians 6:14). It's all about faith — trusting in the word and work of God in Christ.

But that leaves us with a question (3:31): *what is the place of law?* There is no article ("the") before "law" in the Greek. Paul is not talking about the Mosaic Law, but about law in general — that which governs our words and conduct. Does faith annul law? "By no means!" Paul says. In fact, our faith *establishes* law — upholds it. Our faith places law in its proper context and shows its true purpose (see 4:15; 5:13). Unlike the Jews, who dragged the law down to their own level so they could "keep it," our faith raises the law up and displays it as holy and just and good (7:12).

Yes, the law exposes our sins, but since we have placed our faith in Christ, we have access to forgiveness as we continually confess our sins (see I John 1:7 to 2:1).

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