

The Old Paths

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“Ye Cannot Serve The Lord”

Jarrod Jacobs

“**N**ow therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods; For the LORD our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed: And the LORD drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the LORD; for he is our God. And Joshua said unto the people, **Ye cannot serve the LORD:** for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good. And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses. Now

therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel. And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey” (Josh. 24:14-24).

The words in our title are found in Joshua 24:19. There, Joshua tells the people, “Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.” Why did Joshua say these things? In this text, we see that the Israelites could not serve and please God until certain things had happened. In like manner, we cannot please and serve God until certain things occur in our own lives. “Ye cannot serve the Lord” unless...

We Fear Him (v. 14).

Joshua said, “Now therefore fear the Lord...” This is a concluding statement, referring back to the preceding verses. They were expected to fear the Lord because of what God promised Abraham (v. 2-4), because of what had happened in Egypt (v. 5-7), and because of what had happened in Canaan (v. 8-13; Deut. 6, 10-11)!

In like manner, we must fear the Lord. First of all, we do it because it is a command (I Pet. 2:17). In addition to this, we must fear the Lord because He purchased our salvation through Christ’s blood (I Pet. 1:16-19). Further, fearing the Lord causes us to be acceptable with God (Heb. 12:28; Rom. 12:1-2). Finally, fearing God is essential when we

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We Serve God In Sincerity And In Truth (v. 14).

It was not enough for the Israelites

to merely “go through the motions.” They had to believe the truth and serve God from the heart! Unfortunately, in Christ’s time the people had not changed. Jesus said, *“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matt. 15:8-9). When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman, He told her, *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (Jn. 4:24). Just as in Old Testament times, God expects His people today to worship Him in “sincerity” (spirit) and in “truth”! We are not to merely “go through the motions”! We are to worship God “in” (in connection with) spiritual things and in connection with the truth!

Sincerity is something that “tests the mettle” of souls during the tough times (II Cor. 1:6-12). Those who are insincere and faithful to God in “word only” (Fair-weather Christians) will never make it. Let us ask ourselves, “Are WE serving God in sincerity and in truth?”

We Put Away Our Idols (v. 14).

The Israelites had many idols to put away. They had to put away idols from their own heritage (v. 2), i.e., idols Abraham’s father served (fire, light, the sun, moon, etc.). They had to put away the idolatrous practices that had influenced them from without (The gods of the Egyptians, Amorites, Moabites, -- Baal, Ashteroth, serpents, vegetables, etc.). They also had to stop the idolatrous practices from within. Remember the golden calf worshipped by the people (Ex. 32)? The push toward idolatry

came from within at times, therefore God warned the people, saying, *“If thy brother, ... or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, ... entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God...”* (Deut. 13:6-11).

We, as spiritual Israel, must also put away our idols! Put simply, idolatry is the religion of sight in opposition to that of faith! We must do as the Israelites did and put away the idols from our own heritage. In other words, may we never be guilty of loving our family more than God (Matt. 10:37).

We must also put away the idols that influence us from without such as greed, lust, lying, relative thinking, etc. Even though many around us are doing it, does this justify wrong behavior? NO (I Cor. 15:33)!! “Others” engaging in idolatrous behavior no more justifies us than it justified the Jews when the heathen nations practiced idolatry. We must be strong!

Some idolatrous practices take place from within! Consider Colossians 3:5: *“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth;*

fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Our own thinking sounds pretty wise, doesn’t it? Yet, we must not be enamoured with our thoughts, but with God’s will (I Pet. 4:11)! We must make sure we do not follow our own heart to destruction (Prov. 16:18, 18:7)!! Let us make sure that we allow NOTHING to come between us and God!!

We Make Some Choices (v. 15).

Now that the idolatrous practices had been revealed, it was time for the Israelites in Joshua 24 to come to a decision. GOD OR SATAN?? This decision must be made by all. Elijah challenged the people to choose between God and Baal (I Kings 18:21). Jesus also made it clear that the people, including the apostles, had a choice to make as to whether or not they would truly follow Him (Jn. 6:66-67).

Today, we also have this decision to make. If we are to be right with God, we must choose between living for self or living for God (Heb. 11:24-26). We must make the choice to be either spiritually minded or carnally minded (Rom. 8:6). We must also choose between the strait and narrow or the broad way (Matt. 7:13-14). Friends, these decisions must be made NOW!!

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