**“But My Preacher Says…”**

As you read through the history of the Israelites, a disturbing pattern emerges. At times, the people were steeped in wickedness and idolatry. At other times, we find them engaged in significant religious reforms. Too often the difference lay in who the king happened to be at the time. It would be easy to jump to the conclusion that the king alone decided whether his nation would worship Jehovah or false gods. Did God expect His people to mindlessly follow their leaders into religious error? In a theocracy in which civil law and religious law were one and the same, was the individual even allowed to decide for themselves?

One clear sign that God held individuals accountable for their unfaithfulness was that He brought punishment on the people themselves, not just the leadership. The fact that the majority so frequently followed along is discouraging, but there were notable exceptions.

Ahab and Jezebel had led the Northern Kingdom of Israel into wholesale Baal worship and in 1 Kings 19:14, Elijah lamented to God that they had “killed Your prophets with the sword and I alone am left…” In verse 18, God made it clear to Elijah that there were, in fact, “7,000 in Israel all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.” These were folks with enough personal conviction to reject the false religion of their leaders and remain faithful to Jehovah. So, what’s the lesson for us? ***God holds me accountable for my actions despite bad spiritual leadership.***

**“But my preacher says…”** God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the church to aid in the edification of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12). We still have the apostles and prophets in the form of the inspired written word, and these scriptures are the only reliable source of divine authority that we have (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Preachers, teachers and leaders can be helpful, but we must recognize that they are fallible men who ever rely on the written word for their own guidance. There are those who “teach as doctrines the precepts of men,” and those false doctrines can render a person’s worship vain (Matthew 15:9). Individuals will be condemned in the judgement for practicing lawlessness (Matthew 7:23), and having been misled by false teaching will not be a legitimate excuse.

**“Well, the elders are deciding how the money is spent!”** When a group of Christians band together and pool their resources, they are engaged in collective efforts *under the oversight of elders.* Every member is having fellowship in the work whether or not those activities are authorized in the pages of the New Testament. Some will attempt to justify remaining a member of a church engaged in unscriptural programs by throwing their money in the collection plate on Sunday and washing their hands of the use of that money on Monday. Isn’t it interesting that as Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, he addressed his concerns to the entire congregation, not just the leadership? *The elders provide the oversight, but the members are accountable.*

Each of us is tasked with the responsibility to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God” by “accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). I support preachers, teachers and leaders as long as their teaching and leadership are consistent with the sound doctrine of the inspired scriptures. In the judgment, “but my preacher said…” just won’t cut it.

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