



Discussions with My Friend: An Introduction to the Gospel of Jesus Christ By David Stewart

Chapter 24: Seeking God's Will or Imposing Man's?

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Seeking God's Will or Imposing Man's?

Most individuals choose their religion on the basis of personal preference and convenience: What tradition were they raised in? Where do their friends go? What pastor do they like the most? What doctrine is the most appealing or easiest and will pose the least disruption to their chosen lifestyle? These questions make no consideration of the central question of which church, if any, is God's, and impose man's own rather than seeking the divine.

We can gain insights into why God's hand is not more readily manifest in the religious world by examining what different faiths do in order to seek God's will. The great majority of Christian faiths candidly acknowledge that they have no special relationship to God, no revelation, and no divine direction. Christianity has gone from the New Testament church which was entirely directed by God, to modern churches which are not only not directed by God, but often do not even inquire of Him to know His will! The hierarchical meetings of most religious faiths are akin to political conventions where delegates represent constituents interests, jockey for support, trade favors, and lobby for their own agenda. The delegates make no secret of their agenda and bias, and advocate predetermined viewpoints without any serious attempt to know or understand God's will. In scripture, God required individuals and societies to make sacrifices that often went against their personal interests, and individuals were expected to subject themselves to the will of God.

Modern Christian denominations overwhelmingly acknowledge their own lack of the divine connection with God that characterized the scriptural church. Katharine Jefferts Schori, head bishop of the Episcopal Church in America, discussed her church's approach to theology in National Public Radio interviews.^[1] Mrs. Schori largely acknowledged that her church was a man-made organization with no direct connection to God, and that policies were determined by vote and consensus rather than by divine revelation. In discussing various controversies that have led to a schism in her own denomination, from the ordination of women as priests to the ordination of homosexuals, she observed that modern society had "decided differently" from the Bible on many points, such as the prohibition on usury. She pointed out that the Bible does not contain specific direction on many modern challenges, and so churches have had to devise their own doctrines and policies. Although traditional Christians have viewed the practice of working women to the ministry as un-Biblical, she supported this practice by claiming that Mary Magdalene was "the apostle to the apostles" while failing to distinguish between mere service and other Christian acts, and the empowered ministry of Christ's disciples, who had been specifically called to the ministry and ordained within an organized church hierarchy. For millennia, Christians have overwhelmingly read the Bible as strictly forbidding homosexual relations, but Ms. Schori claimed that most modern scholars read biblical passages condemning homosexuality as referring to abuse rather than to committed relationships. There was no mention of prayer or fasting to know of God's will, nor of any receipt of divine revelation through the Holy Spirit.

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As I listened to Ms. Schori, I could not help but wonder: If there are no prophets and no divine revelation from God on the earth today as Episcopalians and other "orthodox" Christians claim, what right do nominally Christian churches have to unilaterally "decide differently" from scripture? If it is within the power of individuals or societies to overrule God and change or revoke His laws without divine revelation, what value or sanctity does holy scripture really have? Without prophets on the earth to speak to us today clearly and without apology regarding God's teachings, is there any truth or principle that cannot be explained away or ignored to support a partisan agenda? How many thoughtful readers of scripture can genuinely believe that recent trends in the Episcopal Church and some other faiths in accommodating women bishops, homosexual bishops, and a host of other practices, originate in careful study of scripture itself rather than in retroactive attempts to rationalize the accommodation of external social pressures? As Ms. Schori discussed the various dissensions and plurality of interpretations of Scripture within her own denomination, the words of the 14-year-old Joseph Smith came to my mind: "the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible" ([Joseph Smith - History 1:12](#)).

Sectarian Christianity's Cafeteria Religion

Who can believe that Christ would accept or even recognize the modern sectarian Christian churches -- much less that He personally leads them and is able to convey His word to them today -- when clear scriptural teachings have become controversial to many faiths? In Dostoyevsky's *Brother's Karamazov*, Christ returns to medieval Spain during the inquisition only to be condemned by an inquisitor who does not allow Him to speak for Himself. Would Christ really fare any better if He were to return to today's Christendom? There is no more room for the confused faiths of sectarian Christianity to acknowledge Christ's living word today, than for secular scholars to acknowledge God's hand in the universe -- not because of claims that Christ has not spoken since the time of the New Testament, nor from any lack of evidence, but because He is excluded a priori.

Sectarian Christianity has become little more than a cafeteria religion, where adherents pick and choose double servings of grace, mercy, and forgiveness while passing over with lip service the obedience, sacrifice, and personal purity that are prerequisites to divine blessings. Without living prophets with a direct link to God, who can wonder that such churches have gone so far afield? What position are they in to criticize Latter-day Saints for lacking their idiosyncratic "orthodoxy" when their doctrinal orthodoxy, like that of the ancient Pharisees, is to unscriptural tradition formulated centuries after the death of the apostles rather than to scripture?

The only reasonable conclusion is that such churches are not Christ's church. Malachi recorded the word of the Lord: "I am the Lord, I change not" ([Malachi 3:6](#)). In the Book of Mormon, the Lord declares: "For behold, I am God; and I am a God of miracles; and I will show unto the world that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and I work not among the children of men save it be according to their faith" ([2 Nephi 27:33](#)). The primary reason why the tree of sectarian Christianity has been barren is because of a lack of faith -- not of blind faith, but of faithfulness and dedication to God. If we want to find God's influence in the world, we must earnestly seek it by living by "every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" ([Matthew 4:4](#)).

It is the worst kind of folly to suppose that the salvation can be administered by bad people preaching from the Good Book, and that the character of ministers is unimportant because the word of God is found in scripture. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." [The Book of Mormon prophet Alma expounded: "trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments" \(Mosiah 23:14\)](#). The apostle John goes further: "He that saith, I know him [God], and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" ([1 John 2:4](#)).

FOOTNOTES

[1] Fresh Air, National Public Radio, 6 October 2008.