

## DON'T TRANSMIT HOLINESS

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In the last chapters of the book of Ezekiel we are given a vision of the restored temple. In the instruction to the priest there is a peculiar command. Chapter 44:19 reads "And when they (the priests) go into the outer court they shall but off their garments in which they have been ministering and lay them in the holy chambers, then they shall put on other garments that they may not transmit holiness to the people. These same instructions are stated again in chapter 46:20 when the priests are given instruction on where to bake the grain offering. These instructions are evidently based upon Exodus 29:30 and 30:26-30 where Moses is given instruction concerning the furniture of the tabernacle. Here it is stated that the furniture is "most holy" and "whatever touched it shall be holy." This reads as if holiness were communicable disease and could be caught by touching these items. God prohibited any contact with the sanctuary, its furnishings, and objects, including the priestly garments by anyone other than the priests. Ezekiel's concern is not the potential victims, but protecting the sanctity of the sanctuary. Holiness was reserved to that which God made holy. This was so serious under the Levitical system that only those things that God designated as holy were holy. Holiness was not to be transmitted to something that God had not designated as being holy.

In the New Testament there are several things God has designated as being "holy." The Spirit of God is the "Holy Spirit." When the angel announced to Mary that she would conceive and bear a son he tells her "the holy seed shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Peter refers to Jesus as a "holy child" (Acts 4:27, 30), and the book of Hebrews states that Christ as our High Priest is "holy" (Heb. 7:26). The Scriptures are said to be "holy" (II Tim. 3:15; Rom. 1:2). The law is "holy" (Rom. 7:12). The people of God are said to be holy (Heb. 3:1) and they are called a "holy nation" and a "holy city" (I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 21:2). There are many other things God has designated as being "holy" such as angels, our calling, and even a kiss. Old Testament warnings concerning transmitting holiness should be taken seriously by the church today.

We are not to transmit holiness to things God has not designated as being holy, yet this has been a practice of the church throughout history. One of the most common practices transmitting holiness today is in the use of Christian symbols. *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* defines Christian symbolism as "the use of symbols, including archetypes, arts, artwork and events by Christianity. It invests objects or actions with inner meaning expressing Christian ideas." There is nothing wrong with using Christian symbols per se but if they are felt to be sacred objects then it is transmitting holiness to the symbol.

**Don't transmit holiness to the cross.** The cross, as we know it today, has become the symbol of Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church has attached great mystical significance to the

cross resulting in the crucifix becoming a physical token of the presence of God. People have come to feel that by the wearing of a crucifix or regularly making the sign of the cross, God will be with them. While Protestants debunk the idea of a crucifix, they have nevertheless made an image of the cross something sacred and have simply taken the figure of Christ off the crucifix and the empty cross has taken its place. Many Christians have a great emotional attachment to this symbol. It is worn as a necklace, worn as ear rings and gracing the steeples of church buildings and the tops of the communion trays. Our hymn books are filled with songs about the cross and the death of Christ and few about the significance of the living Christ. Upon examining a popular Hymnal used in many churches today there was found 44 songs about His birth, 56 about His death, only 19 about his resurrection and none on the ascension. We should not think of the symbol of the cross as being holy.

We may not think of the cross as an emblem of worship but the religious world has laid so much emphasis on the cross we have neglected the importance of the resurrection in salvation and have ignored the ascension as having anything to do with our spiritual life. We have also clung so tightly to the cross as the instrument of the shedding of Christ's blood we have failed to understand the significance of his blood beyond his dying for our sins. The fact that his blood was shed must be taken further than Golgotha. The book of Hebrews tells us Christ "entered once for all into the Holy Place, not taking the blood of goats and calves but taking His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). The writer continues: "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is his flesh and since we have a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith..." (Heb. 10:20-22). The example of this is when the High Priest went into the Holy Place on the day of atonement and offered blood of animals on behalf of the nation (Lev. 16:1-28). Christ entered "the holy place not made with hands, but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24). Therefore the cross would have meant nothing without the resurrection and ascension.

**Don't transmit holiness to patriotism.** When we say this we are in no way disparaging patriotism. However many Christians overly esteem their nationality, so that it is held on par with their faith. American patriotism had its roots in the early founding of the country. Robert Middlekauff in his classic work entitled *The Glorious Cause* wrote: "The generation that made the Revolution were the children of the twice-born, the heirs of the seventeenth-century religious tradition. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and many who followed them in revolution may not have been men moved by religious passions. But all had been marked by the moral dispositions of a passionate Protestant." The religious influence on American revolutionaries came largely through sermons. James P. Byrd wrote in *The Christian Century*: "Political sermons struck a chord in colonial America. More than that, they forged American patriotism up to the present time. From that time on

the meaning of America centered on patriotism with religious overtones. Equipped with their skillful use of scripture, ministers crafted patriotic sermons around major themes of sacrifice and courage in the heat of battle. Knowing well that much of scripture included martial themes and heroic figures, preachers stressed that wartime sacrifice had spiritual significance.”

There is no doubt that “religious Patriotism” and political sermons had a part bringing about the American Revolution, but is this the commission given to the church by God, and more explicitly to ministers, to accomplish His purpose in the world? One passage of scripture that the revolutionary patriots ignored and many conservative Christians conveniently ignore is II Corinthians 10:3-6: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations, and every high thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.” Fortresses (strongly fortified resistance to God), speculations (various systems of false philosophy) and high things (exalted opinions of men), that are found in the laws and dictates of the government, cannot be abolished by using the world’s weapons of political power. The weapons of this fallen (political) world are fashioned out of human pride and arrogance and a holy God will not honor such strategies. That’s the reason the Christian Right has run into a brick wall.

What then is the Christian’s patriotic response to the government? I Timothy 2:1-3: “First of all I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.”

Romans 13:1-7: “Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for he is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword for nothing; for he is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them; tax to whom tax is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”

Matthew 22:21: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”

I Peter 2:13-17: “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

Does this mean we are always to obey human laws? Is it ever appropriate to disobey, and is this disobedience to civil law justified? The Scriptures give four occasions when it was right to disobey governing authorities. Although these four cases are different they have one common lesson for us: when we are commanded by the authorities to do something that would cause us to disobey God, we are to refuse to obey the officials. There are two instances when disobeying the authorities was justified in order to save human life; one instance regarding worship and the last concerning the preaching of the gospel. First: Exodus 1:15-22: The Hebrew midwives were instructed by Pharaoh to kill every male child at birth. But “the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live” (ver. 17). Second: Joshua 2:1-5: When Israel came to Jericho Joshua sent two spies into Jericho and they lodged in the house of Rahab. “And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying ‘Bring out the men who have come to your house,’ but the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, ‘yes the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from and I do not know where the men went’...she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them” (ver. 3-5). Hebrews 11:31 states: “By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.” Third: Daniel 3:1-18: King Nebuchadnezzar built a statue and commanded all bow down and worship the idol. Three Hebrew slaves, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refused to obey the king’s command. To disobey the king was to be thrown into a fiery furnace. Their response to the king was: “‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand O King. But if not, let it be known to you, O King that we are not going to serve gods or worship the golden image that you have set up’” (ver. 16-18). We know the rest of the story. They were thrown into the furnace but God delivered them. Fourth: Acts 4:16-20: The Apostles Peter and John were summoned before the authorities and “they command them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard.’ But when they had threatened them they let them go” (Ver. 18-21).

We must remember our patriotism is an expression of loyalty and support of a worldly culture. As good and decent as this culture may be it is still destined for judgment as a worldly system. Jesus confronted the culture of his day, not by attacking and trying to change the systems of the world, but by destroying Satan’s grip on culture. He did this not by a ministry of condemnation of a corrupt Roman system that held the people in political bondage, rather he directed his attention to the corrupt religious system that had long ago left the teachings and concepts of God’s revealed law. Douglas D. Webster states in *Christian Living In A Pagan Culture*: “The Pharisees knew full well that the leeway extended to them under Roman policy could easily be curtailed if they no longer commanded the respect and authority of the general populace (John 11:47, 48). What really disturbed them was Christ’s power and authority, his revolutionary approach to the ceremonial law, and his constant association with the despised people of society.” The Pharisees were an example of holiness being transferred to patriotism of a worldly system. There is a danger of religious people doing the same today.