

Call to Obedience
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Careless Clichés – In Need of Retirement

A cliché is an overused expression that at one time served a good purpose. The two I am dealing with today are possibly the worst killers in Christendom: 1) All you have to do is believe, and 2) It is all about Him.

Both of them promote a mentality of passivity. Let us have a look.

1. All you have to do is to believe.

Let us begin with the “all we have to do” segment of this cliché. If you are young you still may have confidence in this expression. But to those of us who have traveled some miles, we have ceased to build castles and bridges on an “all you have to do” formula. We have found ourselves lost too many times when we stopped to ask a local for directions. He told us “all you have to do is ... you can't miss it.” And, of course, we missed it. Or we remember the computer that broke down. We were told, “All you have to do is...” and we were charged \$50. But, to this day that computer is still resting peacefully in our basement, among other retirees who also died with “all you have to do...” written on their gravestones.

But as much harm as has been done with this innocent sounding phrase in earthly things, so much more harm has been done by it in the Kingdom of God. For millions of churchgoers “all you have to do is believe,” has become the most damning sentence that has ever been spoken to them. As their poor souls grope around in the everlasting darkness they wish somebody would have told them that there's a lot more to the business of Christianity than to believe.

This “all you have to do is believe” is exactly what the devils want for you. For faith without content is what they themselves live by. However, James tells us they actually tremble as well because they know that it will keep them in hell forever (2:19). Friend, if your faith is as empty as theirs, you will spend eternity with them.

That belief is indeed absolutely necessary for us to come to Christ, walk with God and make it to heaven is not in question and never has been in the entire history of the church. The problem arises when we make faith the only criteria for new life, walking with God and finding entrance to the throne of

God. Let it be noted that "all you have to do is believe" only has validity when everything else that needs to be done has been done.

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible never uses the phrase "all you have to do is believe." The theology that "all you have to do is believe" is a product of man's shallow biblical knowledge or wishful thinking.

The biggest problem in the God/man relationship has never been disbelief, but disobedience. Adam believed, but he did not obey; so did King Saul, and the list goes on. Neither was Nicodemus' problem unbelief: he needed to be born again. The rich young ruler believed in Jesus, but Jesus told him to sell all, give it to the poor and follow Him. The five virgins in the Parable of the Ten Virgins who did not make it to heaven believed wholeheartedly but they were negligent in keeping their lamps burning. The man in the Parable of the Talents who buried his talent instead of putting it to work also believed but was condemned to hell. The Jewish multitude on the day of Pentecost believed, but Peter told them that was not enough, they needed to repent to be received by Christ.

You can believe all you want, but if you do not do what Jesus tells you to do, your faith loses its pulse as a brother of Jesus affirms by saying: *What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith, and have not works, can faith save him* (James 2: 14)?

Beware of the "all you have to do" people. Too often they have a cheap-skate mentality – they go to the flea market and bargain the already good prices down until the poor merchant goes home without profit and no food for his children. These cheapskates then come to church and testify, "The Lord gave me a bargain." No, that is not the way the Lord does things. These are the kind of people who bargain with God for the cheapest way to get to heaven. When they ask, "what must I do to be saved" they really mean "how *little* must I do to be saved."

Friend, the Kingdom of God is not a flea market. Christianity is not a cheap religion. Jesus paid full price, so must you. He gave His life for you; He demands that you give your life to Him (Rom. 12:1). *...present your bodies a living sacrifice...* You can't haggle with Him (Luke 9:59-62). He taught His disciples that forsaking all had to become part of their faith.

2. It is All About Him.

This cliché has had special prominence in the family of God for centuries. That its originators meant good is not in question. As the true saint goes about his daily tasks, it is indeed all about Jesus: the one who sought him, bought him and who keeps him. The true saint's perpetual desire is that *He must increase, but I must decrease* (John 3: 30).

However, as we are blessed when a concertmaster plays the piano, we are less blessed when a novice gets on the bench. This is where the problem is. "It is all about Him" is safe with a saint who can rightly divide the Word of God, but it is dangerous for the mind of the backslider. To the average churchgoer "it is all about Him" too often leads to an attitude of callous indifference and religious passivity. To these believers "it is all about Him" means that Jesus did it all, and there is nothing left for him to do: no repenting, no forsaking all, no taking up the cross to follow Jesus, no prevailing in prayer for the lost nor any witnessing on a regular basis. He is simply told to reckon himself to be alive in Christ, and to expect to wake up in heaven someday.

For the sake of biblical soundness and the good of our souls this cliché needs to be retired. Now, when I say "for the sake of biblical soundness" I mean that "it is all about Him" is incomplete theology and bad publicity even as much as it may be enjoyed by some of the saints. For if you were to ask Jesus whether it was all about Him, He would start talking as if it were all about **us**. He created the whole universe for **us**, and He has made a fuss about **us** ever since, from occupying Himself with Jacob's speckled goats to dying on the cross for **us**. He has made **us** His very dwelling place, His holy temple, and it is His goal that the glory that is in Him will get into all of **us** as it got into the Apostle Paul who boldly said: *And they glorified God in me* (Gal.1:24) and who also prayed that **we** all *might be filled with all the fullness of God* (Eph. 3:19).

Christ came from heaven to put Himself into us. Don't say: He is everything, I am nothing. Did Jesus die for nothing? We are His jewels, His heirs, His joint heirs, His brothers, His pride and joy. Jesus has linked Himself indelibly together with us forever and ever. On this point Richard Wurmbbrand, a pastor who suffered 14 years under communism, had the nerve to say, I am He and He is me. That may be too much for you. But this is the way lovers talk. And are not these words very much akin to the words of Jesus when He said, *abide in me, and I in you* (John 15:4). Let us not get miserly or technical when it comes to loving our Lord. In loving Him let us be as extravagant and reckless as the woman who anointed Him for his burial (Mark 14:3). If you take Christ out of people there is no church, there is no light in the church, and that is bad publicity. There must be more than a theological connectedness with our Lord, our hearts must be literally knit together with His.

No, my friend, to Him it is not all about Him. It is not all up there. For Him it is as much down here as it is up there. **To Him it is as much about us as it is about Him.** If you make it all about Him you annul the whole process of redemption. If you take man out of the God/man equation the whole Bible becomes meaningless. No sir, it will not be a bachelor's party at

the Second Coming, it will be a wedding, He and us joined together in holy matrimony! "It is all about Him" has solid biblical support, but it is incomplete, because it leaves out the Divine Romance. It leaves out the bride. Doctrines, even the best of them, when found outside the love relationship do not have a song. And if a doctrine does not have a love song, it has no transforming power. It is as cold as a dead man leading to nothing but strife and sectarianism.

My beloved is mine and I am his (Song. 2:16).

This should be at the heart of all theology. Let's talk it, preach it and sing it. Let us cease being passive about it. Let us love our Lord with the fervency with which He loves us. "It is all about Him", is good doctrine, but "It is all about US" is better. *Let us wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb.* The bridegroom is on His way.

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