

Red Herrings and White-washed Tombs

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When I was a brand new homeschooler, the Lord blessed me enormously by having us go and live close to a group of families who were all seasoned homeschoolers. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't have had a CLUE how to do this thing he had laid on my heart! We lived there for a couple of years, and formed many life-long friendships. We go back and visit every chance we get! Those lovely people are still among our dearest friends.

However, during the time we lived there, there was a lot of very interesting information and teaching floating around on a variety of subjects. All of us strongly desired to be sold out for Jesus - to live a life that reflected God in every way. We did not want to be conformed to the world's way of doing things, but to be transformed to God's way of thinking. That sincere and earnest desire, though, made us somewhat vulnerable to some ideas that really were nothing more than the thinking of man - red herrings that the devil used to distract us from what was really important. (By "red herring" I mean "something that draws attention away from the central issue; a diversion or distraction"). Most of us have long since realized that these issues that seemed so very important at the time, were really not that important after all, and we've moved on. Sadly though, there are some who did not see the truth, but who became enslaved to the bondage of the "traditions of man".

What sort of ideas am I talking about? Oh, beloved, there are endless numbers of ideas and teachings out there that all could be labeled as red herrings! Many of them might be good ideas in and of themselves, but when taken to extremes, or preached as "gospel", or the ONLY way for a Christian to live, there is a very real danger of them becoming bondage. Here's a list of just some of these types of issues that come to mind:

- Woman must wear dresses or skirts - never pants.
- Woman must wear a head covering
- Christians must homeschool their children
- Father's must lead the family in devotions every day
- REAL Christians live in the country and grow all their own food (homesteading)

- Good keepers at home make all the families food from scratch - no store-bought bread or pastry or what have you
- Homeschool moms should wear denim jumpers (ok, that one's a little tongue-in-cheek! ;-))
- Sundays must be a day of rest
- Saturday is the REAL Sabbath
- Christmas and Easter shouldn't be celebrated by Christians, because they are really heathen festivals
- Modern Christian music is from the devil
- Only such-and-such a version of the Bible is correct and therefore acceptable
- Christians must not date before marriage
- The husband must be the one to control and manage the finances
- Keepers at home don't need time out - they should love to be surrounded by their children 24/7 and never need a break!
- You must tithe 10% of your income
- Boys must be circumcised
- Family planning of any kind is a sin, regardless of the circumstances
- God is the Great Physician, therefore Christians should never go to the doctor
- You must be water baptized in order to be saved.

Oh yes, I've heard ALL these and plenty more besides over the years. And usually they are explained and backed up by Bible verses and sound so RIGHT! So convincing! So holy!

Now, don't get me wrong - I am not belittling anyone who adheres to any or all of these ideas! As I said before, each of them can be a good idea - it really comes down to a matter of the heart.

I think the real danger comes when we become convinced that any of these types of ideas is a MUST - a must not just for us, but for any other Christian - that this is the only right way of doing things. If we come to believe that, then many other Christians are not going to measure up to our standards, and we may become puffed up and proud. A tragic example of this is one family I know. The parents are both Christians. They have 6 children and they homeschool. She has listened to all these teachings over the years, and believed them. She has tried to do them all. Unfortunately, she also

began to judge her husband, who wasn't so convinced about all these things, and find him wanting. This man is a good, Christian man. He is hard working, kind and generous, and loves his wife and kids. But he is not super-spiritual, or very refined. He's very much a "real" man. She has now kicked him out of their home and is taking him to court so she can get sole-custody of the children, because she is convinced that he is a bad influence on the children, due to what she sees as his lack of leadership and spiritual qualities. Meanwhile, she is nearing complete burnout or breakdown, because she is so under bondage to being a super-woman and doing everything perfectly, herself. ☹️

I have known of several other women over the years who have lost the plot. Women who had big ministries, large families, homeschooled, advocated all the keeper-at-home ideas, led the way in ideas like those above, and more besides. Mostly good ideas, kept in balance. But when they get out of balance, disaster looms. Two such ladies I know of, from different parts of the world, each with families of 10 children - the kinds of woman whom many looked up to and the last people on earth you would expect to turn their backs on it all - both of them suddenly abandoned their husbands and families and ran off with other men. ☹️ They've given up everything they once believed in, and turned their backs on their families, their ministries, and their God. Why? Because the burden of living under the bondage they had taken on became too much. And unfortunately, instead of realizing they had taken on a yoke of their own creation, and humbling themselves enough to allow God to help them to change, they simply threw in the towel and quit.

If you feel a leading or conviction about something, some issue that comes up, ask yourself this: is my "conviction" coming directly from God speaking to my heart and through his Word, or is it coming from the persuasive teachings of some person? If the latter is involved, please be very, very careful. That is not to say that God cannot use godly men and women to show us the way - he often does. Just be cautious about taking on board any teaching that involves you having to live a certain way or do a certain thing (or not do them, as the case may be).

In addition, consider whether your husband is in agreement with you. Women can be, on the one hand, much more spiritually sensitive than men, but on the other hand they are also much more easily lead into deception. (see 1 Tim

2:11-15) I think that is part of why God made men less intuitive than women - they may be slower sometimes to "see" deep truths, but they are also steadier and less prone to jumping aboard the latest fads and ideas. Husbands and wives balance each other. If God is really telling you to do something, and your husband does not agree, then obey your husband. God is perfectly capable, in his own time, of showing our husbands the truth, and will do so. He does not need us to convince our husbands or win them over to our own way of thinking with persuasive arguments!

Sisters, don't make life so complicated! God does not require us to follow a list of rules and do's and don'ts. In fact, Jesus spoke out very strongly against the Pharisees and religious teachers of his day, who gave the people many rules and teachings to follow, saying: *"They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for men to see..... Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear as people of righteousness but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."* Matt 23:4-5a, 27-28

I don't know about you, but I personally don't want to be a "white-washed tomb"! I don't want to appear righteous on the outside, but inside harbor all sorts of foolishness and wrong thinking and sin. The problem with getting caught up in "good ideas" is that they often take our focus off the heart, and off God, and onto outward appearances and works.

Paul put it like this in his letter to the Colossians:

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the

worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." Col 2:13-3:4

In Matthew 6, Jesus talks about our eyes (focus), treasure (possessions), needs and heart. He tells us not to worry about what we will eat or wear, but to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you as well." He makes it clear where our focus is to be - on God himself, not on the things of this world. Beloved, if we will do that, if we will focus fully on God, and concentrate on knowing him and loving him and serving him, everything else will fall into place. In fact, most of it will simply fall away. As the song says, when you look full in the face of God, the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. So many of the things we worry about and get worked up about, really don't matter much at all. The things we should count as important are the basic tenets of our faith - that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died and rose again and paid for all our sins, and that he is alive and with the Father. That we can accept his death on our behalf, be forgiven, and receive eternal life. That the Holy Spirit is given to us to teach us and lead us, and that God is working in our lives to make us more like Jesus, who is coming again. THESE things matter! These things we should be sure of, understand, and live out. With everything else, test it carefully, hold fast to what is good, and let the rest go!

If you and your husband feel a real conviction from God to follow a certain lifestyle or do a certain thing, then by all means do it, as one who obeys God, not man. But remember to keep in mind always that this conviction is for YOU and for NOW - there is no requirement for other believers to do as you do, and it is entirely possible that what God is leading you to do now will not be what he wants you do continue doing in 10 years time. Also, use Galatians 5:22-23 as a check - is this thing in your life producing the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control), or is it producing tension, arguments, jealousy, pride, selfish ambition, fits of rage, discord and so on? Anything that does not produce, or help to produce, the right fruit in your life is not of God and must go!

Gal 5:1 says "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery." Dear sisters, do not allow yourselves to be burdened by the bondage of ideas and requirements preached by people. Stick only to what God himself leads you to do, and you will be free indeed.

Love
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