

BodyLife Past Article Archive

By Every Word

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Isn't it amazing what people will do in God's name and never think twice about it?

I stood in a beautiful cathedral in Albi, a small city in the south of France. Underneath its entrance was a dungeon. It was the focal point for a crusade launched against a group of French Christians who resisted the corruption of the papacy in the 12th century.

The cathedral was built to intimidate those believers with the might, power and resources of the church. The message couldn't have been clearer if it had been scripted in neon above the hillsides. "No one resists the power of the institutional church and survives."

And none of them did. In 50 years every one of those families who had dared to separate themselves from Rome was imprisoned and killed if they did not repent and rejoin the institution. And, true to Jesus' words, those who did the killing and torturing were certain they were doing God a favor.

Fortunately our religious institutions today don't have the same power to imprison and kill, but it still amazes me how Christians can treat each other with gossip, accusation, lies and manipulation when they feel that the occasion demands it.

It is so easy to claim God's endorsement for our own ideas and be so totally wrong! How often I have watched my best-intentioned efforts have unforeseen consequences that were painful for me and others.

What can save us from such misguided labors? I know only of one thing, and it is clearly seen in the first temptation Jesus faced in the wilderness.

What Sin Is This?

The temptation to make lunch out of rocks has always been an enigma to me. Jesus was at the end of his fast. He was hungry. Changing stones into bread would have been easy for him to do and no one would have been hurt by it. There was nothing wrong with having bread. In fact the request for it is included in the model prayer he taught his disciples. "Give us today our daily bread."

In and of itself it would not have been sin in any way that we know. It was not forbidden in any of the laws of the Old Covenant. It was not even that different from the first miracle he would perform a few days later at a wedding reception by changing water into wine?

Of course, the fact that the enemy was offering the option to him might have been a give away, though I

doubt he was perched on a rock in red tights with his spiked tail curved around his feet. Perhaps his temptation was just like some of ours a good idea to help meet a genuine need.

But Jesus was not fooled. He didn't even try to find a way to make this idea fly. He turned it back instantly and the words he used show us what was really at stake: "It is written, man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

Now the problem comes into sharp focus. Making bread out of stones was not in Father's heart for him to do. This was not God's idea and Jesus knew that the only way to live is by following the voice of his Father, initiating nothing out of his own desires or even need. This was a life lived in trust, and that trust only had expression where it responded to God's voice alone.

The Sin of Assumption

Jesus refused to use whatever power God gave him simply to satisfy his own desires. What a lesson. The sin here was far less obvious than tempting God by throwing himself off of Temple Mount, or falling on his face to worship Satan. No, this was only sin because it had not been borne in the heart of God. It didn't matter how easily he could justify the act with his own rationalizations. He was going to live by every word that came from God, and this one had not come from there.

How do people who think they love God end up destroying people around them? Because they assume they know what Father would do and act accordingly. The sin of assumption is probably the most deceptive of all sins, because it allows us to act in God's name, thinking we are doing his will when in fact we do things that harm his work in us and others at the same time.

But the only way for us to overcome such temptation is to live the same way Jesus did. That is, we stop doing anything just because it sounds good, meets our need, is Biblically justifiable or because someone is pressuring us to do it. Instead, the only question we need to ask is whether or not God has spoken this to us.

It is easy to quote Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" and never realize that we violate that verse every time we act in our best interpretation of what Scripture says. For even then we are still relying on our understanding not on the voice of the Lord.

Rome justified burning at the stake the so-called heretics of the Middle Ages by their misunderstanding of John 15. Jesus said there that his Father gathers up unfruitful branches and burns them. In actions Rome has long since repudiated, the Inquisitors thought it their obligation to act in God's stead by torturing and killing those that would not conform to their practice and teaching.

Of course that's an extreme example, but we do the same thing whenever we assume what God is doing in

our lives instead of waiting for him to speak clearly to us. Whenever we trust our best perspective on things we lean on our own understand and miss the exceedingly more abundant ways that God wants to work in us.

An Ever-Present Voice

Perhaps the greatest joy of intimacy with God is how present God wants to be in our every-day lives. He has not asked us to live the Christian life without him. Christianity was never meant to be a list of principles to which we conform our behavior; it is living reconciled to God in active communion with him every day.

Many believers, however, miss this incredible facet of our relationship with him. Thinking God has given us guiding principles to live by, we grow accustomed to living days or weeks without ever listening to hear what Father has on his heart for us. We make decisions by listing pros and cons, instead of sitting down for any extended period to ask that he make his desires known to us.

Without growing in our ability to recognize what God speaks to us, we can't live to the freedom and joy God wants for us.

Without an ear that listens to God's voice what we call trust is nothing more than presumption; what we call obedience, nothing more than legalism. David knew that. I love his agonizing prayer in the first verse of Psalm 28: "To you I call, O LORD my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit." In other words, "I can't live without you, God. My own wisdom isn't enough. My own resources aren't enough."

That's the joy of living in God. We need him. We want his active engagement in every phase of our lives. We know that without it we are left to our own devices which bring certain failure and pain. No, that doesn't mean we have to ask him permission to brush our teeth or to read the paper, but it means we never get comfortable in life without asking him to reveal himself and his will to me in the situations I face.

Help Me Do That!

I realize that nothing can be more frustrating than trying to hear God's voice, especially if you feel like he never talks to you, even when you listen diligently. I know that many of us have been convinced that we're not good enough, mature enough, or wise to hear God's voice and instead must trust others to tell us what God's mind is.

Don't read these words and take on the burden of having to be good enough to hear from God. I'm not passing out burdens here. God wants you to live the same way Jesus didxby every word that comes from

his mouth.

To do that, he will have to teach you how to hear his voice. It's not the same for all of us. I can't give you three pointers that will work like sticking a decoder over your Taco Bell game piece.

I can tell you that he wants you to know his voice more than you want to know it. I can encourage you to ask him to help you discover how he is doing that with you. For thousands of years he has been making his voice known to men and women who want to hear it. He is really good at doing so.

For us, it simply means that we take an extra moment before rushing headlong into our next, best idea and pause for some time with Father. "What do you want, Lord? What will bring the most glory to you and fulfill your heart in these things?" Then stop and just listen. Do it when you're in the car, waiting in line at the store or doing yard work.

If you don't sense his direction, don't move ahead. It is better to wait until you know than rush off assuming you know best. He'll show you by a conviction in your heart, something you read in Scripture, a comment from a friend or even stranger, by the way circumstances sort out, or by a combination of those.

Learning to live by every word that comes from God was never meant to be a test of spirituality or a merit badge for maturity it's just the way Father wanted his kids to live. If you realize you're accommodating yourself to living without that, maybe now is a good time to remind yourself how involved he wants to be with you.

Seek his face. Talk to him throughout your day and listen and watch for God to make himself and his will known to you. Nothing delights him more.

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