

Gimme That Old Time Religion!

My mind goes back to my childhood when we would sing that old song in a rather nostalgic longing for days when God's Word and ways are honored and revival flooded our land. In a changing world we need to remember "It was good for our fathers and mothers and it's good enough for me." Remember some of the other words, "It was good for Paul and Silas... it will take us all to heaven... it will do when the world's on fire." To see the magnificent work of God in His church is a strong desire of my heart. I believe we are seeing a returning work of God and it's going to become even more evident in our not too distant future. The temptation is to make the shortcut and do what everyone else is doing, whether it's right or wrong. The pressure comes even from well meaning people and is, at times, intense. Compromise here, change this, go here, do this, do that, whatever you do, don't do this. The pressure goes on with terms such as "be user-friendly, don't offend, come as you are, do as you please, market and make it happen!"

Change can be welcome and change can be good, provided the changes fall within the category of bringing glory to God. Too often the willingness to change even at the expense of spiritually backsliding is more than acceptable in the reasoning of many Christians. In many cases it is sadly the norm. Anything is accepted if we reap the desired results. We need to keep two verses in the back of our mind as we contemplate our walk with God and service unto Him: *"Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD"* (Jeremiah 17:5). *"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God"* (I Corinthians 10:31).

Jim Collins, who wrote the book, *From Good to Great*, studied businesses in America that went from being a good company to being a great company. In further research in the years since writing his book, he found something else quite remarkable. He asked, "If you were to take one dollar and invest it in every company represented on the stock market, obviously the one that has made you the most money by now in 2005 would be the most successful company. The company he surprisingly revealed was Southwest Airlines! He made the analogy in the old Sherlock Holmes mystery when asking Watson, "What stood out on the night of the murder?" Watson replied that really nothing had stood out that night, casually commenting, "Why the dogs didn't even bark."

"Precisely, Watson. What, in fact, stands out is the dogs did not bark that night, so whoever committed the crime was known by the dogs!" Thus we see the suspects were considerably now a shorter list. Collins went on to say, "Back in 1972, there were two dogs that didn't bark that give us the greatest clues as to why this company succeeded."

The first dog that didn't bark was that Southwest was not original. They were not innovators. There was another airline called Pacific Southwest that was copied by the founders of Southwest. They copied their service, their routes, and way to do their basics. The second dog that didn't bark and has been given little attention is that of the ten original principles that Southwest was founded upon. Basically, nine out of ten things are untouched. They stayed true to the fundamentals, their core belief. So simple yet profound; like it or not, there it is!

Think of it, in all the industries and business enterprises, nothing has been more volatile and risky than the airplane transportation business. Yet, the number one company in the United States for overcoming, staying on track and getting ahead is Southwest. This industry has literally been in crisis and escalated since September 11, 2001. In crisis, the opinion is usually across the board: change, change, change. Others did change and they bellied up. Southwest stayed the same and went ahead. Please keep these thoughts in your mind as we bring up another person who will parallel these truths.

Santiago Calatrava would be deemed by many to be the top man in architecture today. Among his past magnificent projects, he has been given the privilege of designing The World Trade Center's *Transportation Hub*, a cathedral-like building that will stand where the two towers of The World Trade Center once stood. What an honor! Additionally, he may soon win the privilege of having his design built, called *The Fordham Spire*, which would be built in Chicago and it would become the tallest building in the world.

Calatrava is a Spaniard of medieval knighthood descent. But this is not what has won him prestige; it is his giftedness in designing useful works of art. Aesthetically beautiful, yet enormously practical is his earmark. He was a sculptor, engineer and eventually an architect. As you look at his works you can see that he incorporates all three trades when drawing up plans for a building. When asked what is in his mind as he plans a building, his answer is illuminating. He says, he observes how a tree grows. He said it doesn't grow straight up, it slightly twists around, while tapering toward the top. He observed on the other hand, how he places one squared block upon another, much in the same way the backbone is constructed. He noted, "I watched how we stand and duplicated it." Even to the two foundation-like legs that a few of his gigantic buildings rest upon. His buildings remind me of God's design: *"Honour and majesty are before him: strength and beauty are in his sanctuary"* (Psalm 96:6).

Allow me to dovetail these things together. We have a model: God. Find His design, how He makes us to stand, how He makes us like trees to grow into the sky. Duplicate His principles, then in spite of the change around us, don't change! We need to be balanced and stand and then continue to follow on by growing. The world cries, "Abandon holiness," yet God says, *"O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth"* (Psalm 96:9). To disregard God's holiness is to leave the beauty of life behind. People are saying, "Do away with the Old Book," or "Water it down!" We hear this even in the prophecy of Isaiah when he said, *"That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits"* (Isaiah 30:9, 10). Again in the prophecy of Jeremiah we read, *"The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"* (Jeremiah 5:31). People are demanding nice sweet little sermons and they love to have so! Yet God reminds us: *"Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls..."* (Jeremiah 6:16). *"Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away"* (Luke 21:33).

When we sacrifice the moral absolutes of God's Word for social expediency, we may lunge ahead, but we leave the manifested presence and power of God behind. I was asked last week, "Pastor, can everybody else be wrong, while I am standing alone on this?" (referring to a matter of biblical truth). I reminded my brother of the crowd who cried, "Crucify!" Oh yes, the crowd can be wrong! *"Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil..."* (Exodus 23:2). There is an old adage that says, "Before you move the fences, you need to ask yourself why they were put up to begin with."

Once in a medieval battle a certain country was being bested and the soldiers were running back in retreat screaming, "Bring the standard back to the men." The men around the standard bearer were either killed or wounded and then the bearer himself was teetering under a wound, and as he was close to collapse, a brave, young soldier ran up to the standard bearer and wielding his sword high, raised his voice and said, "No, never! Let us bring the men up to the standard!" Today we face the same situation, as the old time religion is being abandoned for a more streamline, non-offending, fenceless faith. May we hear the clarion call of holy young men and women who will rise to the occasion and *"...earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 3). Let us not run from the battle; let us bring the men back up to the high and holy standard of God. God will still bless "that old time religion"!

- Pastor Pope -

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