

Guard Against Worldliness and Legalism

Several years ago I showed up to speak at a retreat (and I can't believe I'm about to tell you this) with the wrong speaking notes. Right away I noticed decorations and brochures covered with seeds, clearly displaying a 'rooted and grounded in Christ' theme. And my heart sunk to my toes. I prepared for a deeper life, deep waters theme. How did I mess this up?

Without boring you with too much detail, I had back to back retreats at the time, and my contacts for both weekends had the same first name. Somewhere along the line, my emails from the other contact ended up in the wrong event file.

Sure I had fasted, prayed, prepared, and even had my intercessors praying for the event. So why didn't I discern that my theme didn't match their theme?

When the leaders came into the sanctuary, I dropped to my knees and begged forgiveness. I said, "You'll never believe what I've done..." I proceeded to explain my blunder. Thankfully the leaders of this retreat feared God, loved Him so much, and trusted Him completely. They pulled me up to my feet, wrapped their arms around me, and said, "Bring the message God has given you! We want to hear it." Bless God for such wonderful women!

We had a powerful weekend. God healed a woman's back after a long battle with back trouble. Women met God. His power moved mightily in our midst! I stood in awe of God and in the faith of these women. I delivered a 'deep water' message surrounded by seeds, trees, and plant decorations. Simply beautiful.

The other day while reading in the Gospel of Matthew I noticed something powerful. Jesus had just faced off with the Pharisees and Sadducees (who, by the way, hated each other but

came together because of their mutual disdain for the Savior). These guys demanded a sign, a miracle to prove He was God. Yet Jesus had nothing to prove to them and would do no such thing. Even so, their hard hearts stirred up Jesus' love and concern for His disciples.

Once the disciples got in the boat and pushed off shore, they realized they'd forgotten the bread. Jesus, still mulling over His conversation with the Pharisees and Sadducees cautioned the disciples to guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

I know myself so well. I would soooo respond the way the disciples did. Here's their basic response:

"We forgot the bread. He's talking about the bread. He's mad that we forgot the bread. How could we forget the bread?"

Can you just picture Jesus breathing a heavy sigh, titling His head and saying, "Really? You think this is about the bread? Weren't you with Me when I multiplied the loaves and fishes and fed thousands both times? Do you really think that your little mishap will ruin our day? I've got lunch! What I'm saying is, guard your heart!"

The Pharisees were keepers of the law, the sin police. They put all of the emphasis on their ability, their capacity to be righteous. The Sadducees on the other hand, blended with the godless culture and embraced their freedom to do as they pleased and to manipulate their faith to match their lives.

Now let's apply this to us:

Jesus calls us to guard our hearts and minds – with all our hearts and minds! May we, not for a minute, think we can add to what He's already done. He saves us by His grace. Anything we do from there is in grateful response to His amazing love. We can't jump high enough, run far enough, or give enough away to add to what He's already done. And praise God, when we trip

up, forget the bread, or prepare for the wrong event, His Spirit more than surpasses our need. In fact, it's in those weak places where His glory shines brightest. He expects us to mess up and He's already made provision for us.

Regarding worldly Christianity, it's everywhere. And those who blend with a godless culture because of their misunderstanding of their priceless blood-bought 'freedom' in Christ, will not have the strength to stand in these latter days. And, like Lot of the Old Testament, they'll lose their credibility among the lost because they've lived amongst them for too long. We need to reach out for and love the lost, but too often we use that 'call' to live like them as well. God forgive us!

Jesus says to guard against the influences of legalism and worldliness. Don't spend too much time worrying about doing it all right every minute of the day. Scripture says time and time again that it's God and His Word that work in us to make us more like Him, that we might act just like Him.

Oh, how I love Jesus. Don't you?

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