

“Following Instructions”
Monthly Comment – May, 2008

I suspect a lot of men could relate with me on a thing I'll call “Directional Deficiency Syndrome.” I have a serious aversion to directions. For instance, enclosed in almost anything you buy these days is a sheet explaining how the purchase is assembled or operated, as well as everything it can or cannot do. I hate those things! My wife, Marlene, has no problem with those things whatsoever; even the directions that you know originated in a non-English speaking country. She can even follow the “easy” step-by-step pictures that illustrate the written parts of the directions that I'm convinced are really the directions to something other than what I have purchased.

I think I have isolated my deficiency in these matters and I believe it boils down to a woefully inadequate level of the Holy Spirit's fruit of “patience.” In a word, following directions is as much of a problem in my life as it is, because of “impatience.”

I can look at a sheet of directions for 10 seconds and already start to feel a sinking feeling inside of me. I see a sheet of small print and worthless assembly pictures and I give up before I start. I think there is a “lazy” element to it as well, because then Marlene does the assembly. J

Truth is directions are a way of life. “Hear my children, the instruction of a father” (Prov. 4:1). Instructions start coming at an early age. Things don't change as we grow up either. I had 16-plus years of being surrounded by teachers giving me all kinds of instructions and directions.

When you think about where would we be today if we were never given any directions or instructions. It is scary, isn't it? As much as I struggle with directions they are indispensable to my life.

Joshua, the successor to Moses, had some huge shoes to fill. How on earth could he follow that act? Essentially, God told Joshua the same thing He told Moses – follow the directions – read the directions: “This Book of law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8).

I suspect, if we will read any directions or pay attention to any instructions, His book ought to be the one! Agreed?

Mike

"The Fifth First"
Weekly Comment – May 4, 2008

Jesus Christ is first because He says He is the first and the last (Rev. 1:11). The first commandment is related to Him because we are to love God with all of our being. The third "first" if you're not too confused, directly relates to our neighbors. John says we are liars if we say we love God but hate a brother (1 John 4:20) so the next "first" has to do with first being reconciled to our brother (Mt. 5:23).

The fourth "first" in my estimation is what we pursue above all other quests, or as Jesus puts it, "Seek first the Kingdom of God..." (Mt. 6:33). The fifth "first" in my construct is a matter of inner honesty. "First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Mt. 7:5). If you have read this far, come ask me for a dime after the service.

Truth is this "first" is without question the last thing most of us ever do. Personal log removal requires hard and honest self-judgment. Few do it because it is hard and also because it often requires the assistance of another. Just like getting something out of our physical eye by ourselves is difficult, getting those testy personal flaws out of our spiritual eyes are as well. We can't see well enough on our own, we need to enlist the help of a TRUSTED friend to whom we have given permission and access to help us see these things and remove them.

So what is being said here? Before we become so eager to help other people discover their own issues, Jesus tells us to find and deal with our own. In short, with this in mind, there will be a lot less judgment of others.

Let's get to work on the 5th 1st,

Mike

"The Sixth First"
Weekly Comment – May 11, 2008

Frankly I don't know what "first" this Sunday is! Once I got past all the "firsts" connected with God, the remaining "firsts" are any ones guess. So today, I have a special "first" and how appropriate this is on Mother's Day. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you" (Ex 20:12).

Even now I can hear the objections from all you Bible Buffs that say, "Hey, that is no first. There is no first in that command at all." Well be patient with me and kind, after all it is Mothers Day and they need to be first. So here's the spin! Jesus said there are two great Commandments, right? The first 4 commandments concern themselves with man in his relation to God. Have no other God before you; Do not use the LORD'S name in vain; Make no image or likeness of the LORD; and Keep holy on the Sabbath. That of course is the abbreviated version of the first four. OK! So far so good! Those first four actually correspond to that first and greatest commandment Jesus referred to in loving God with all your heart, etc.

Then Jesus said the second commandment is like the first, Love your neighbor, etc. Right? The next six of the 10 commandments all concern themselves with man in relation to his fellow man.

And guess what the FIRST commandment is regarding man's relationship to other people? That's correct, "Honor your mother"!

The honoring of mothers is not old fashion. It includes a respect and also obedience to parents. In a reasonably healthy family the mother is of crucial importance to the wholeness of the home. Generally she is the first to rise, getting the family moving and the last to go to sleep. Mothers are everything from drill sergeants, to comforters, to teachers, to counselors to cheerleaders to chauffeurs. Where would we be really without the gift of our mothers? I don't want to think about it!

So today's "first" is to honor mothers. It is the first of the second half of the original commandments and it is the first and only of the 10 commandments that come with a promise. Honoring mothers result in a long and fruitful life on the earth. That sounds like a good FIRST to me. How about you?

Happy Mother's Day!

Mike

"Just Because"
Weekly Comment – May 16, 2008

"God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations" (Psa. 67:1-2).

The word "bless" has been around since God began His dealings with mankind. God is a 'blesser.'" It is His nature to give, bestow and endow. That is one of the "what's" of God – what He does is bless His children...JUST BECAUSE!

Interestingly, one of the 'why's" of God is answered in this 'what' of God does. Why God blesses is because that is what God does. God is not being merciful, blessing-oriented and shining His face on His people to get something from them, although one could derive that from the second of these quoted verses. He blesses "JUST BECAUSE."

The inspired song writer here is asking for these kindnesses of God so "THAT" God's way could be known on earth, His salvation to all nations. If there were no singular, extraordinary differences in the lives of Jewish people, then peoples of the earth would not have been interested at all in Israel's God - His ways or His salvation!

God's blessings and His mercies are strong points of testimony of the touch of God on His people's lives!

Just Because,

Mike

"What's Finished?"
Weekly Comment – May 25, 2008

Some commentators believe that the very last words spoken by Jesus before He died were, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Some think the very last words He spoke were, "Father, into Your hands

I commit My spirit" (Lk 23:46). There is no conclusive evidence which phrase was His last and it's not necessary to any great degree to hold to one belief or the other.

Have you ever asked yourself, however, what Jesus meant with the statement "It is finished?" It could be a number of things, but we do know one thing He meant perfectly well. In Luke Jesus says "...The Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost" (19:10). We also know from Isaiah that He would "...make His soul an offering for sin" (53:6).

The cross is the primary purpose for which He came 2,000 years ago. In fact, in a quick prayer to Father God He spoke, "Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour" (John 12:27).

So without question at all, we have at least one thing for sure that Jesus meant when He said "It is finished." An acceptable offering for sin to save lost people has been made. The epistle to Hebrews states that it is the last and only sacrifice that can qualify man before God as well. "So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many....after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever He sat down at the right hand of God (Heb. 9:28; 10:12). "To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Heb. 9:28).

That much is finished at least,

Mike