

THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN

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This is the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 WEB

If it's really this simple, why do we need dogmas, doctrines, creeds, churches, seminaries, synods and the hundreds of religious positions, edifices, and philosophies created by humans to supposedly better reach and understand God? It seems to be a particular human need to understand and explain God---even though we instinctively know the immutability and unexplainable nature and attributes of God.

I suspect that most of the religious structures, both human and physical, we have so industriously built over several millennia really have a hidden purpose, not just to do God's will, but to establish and maintain institutional control over people's minds, bodies, and spirits. If that's true, then they become domination systems of the highest order since they attribute their power to God's anointing and favor.

If the "whole duty of man" is to "fear God and keep his commandments," why is this simple truth so muddled by doctrines, creeds, dogmas, and extremely selective applications of scripture? Why does it transform itself into denominations and other forms of organization deliberately created to channel our faith into socially acceptable forms lacking the power to affect any direct change in the evils and oppressions that so much trouble us today?

Why, for example, do we still have poverty condoned and minimized by well-meaning Christians using the comments by both Moses and Jesus about the poor being always with you? Scripture advocates in hundreds of ways that society has a duty to help vulnerable people, so why do we keep denying this truth by claiming we can do nothing about it, since even Moses and Jesus declared the problem insoluble?

The fact that neither Moses nor Jesus meant their comments about endemic poverty in the way religious people now

explain them seems to mean nothing to passive, complacent Christians.

Religious institutions ought to be in the forefront of the struggle against injustice and oppression wherever and whenever they arise. But with few notable exceptions we seem to be slothful laggards, preferring to sit in our comfortable (not physically, but mentally) pews absorbing over and over for uncounted times the same religious pablum that obscures the clear teachings of scripture on personal and group responsibility to act on God's word rather than merely hearing it.

Some of us don't like the Book of James because it demands an active doing of God's Word rather than mere hearing. James 2:14-26 WEB says: What good is it, my brothers, if a man says he has faith, but has no works? Can faith save him? And if a brother or sister is naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you tells them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled;" and yet you didn't give them the things the body needs, what good is it? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself...You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe, and shudder. But do you want to know, vain man, that faith apart from works is dead? Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that...by works faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness;" and he was called the friend of God. You see then that by works, a man is justified, and not only by faith...For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead.

So according to James it really is quite simple: Faith without action is dead. So it's as Mary's refrigerator says: "Say nothing. Do nothing. Change nothing."