

LAWLESS CHRISTIANS

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By
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Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.' Matt. 7:21-23
WEB

Pope Francis has just completed his first visit to the U.S. amid massive crowds and eager interviewers anxious to capture his vital message and compelling presence for those of us who might like to view this historic visit in person, but cannot.

One thing they reported accurately was that the pope would tell us some things we wanted to hear, and other things we didn't want to hear. We love to feel forgiven and approved by God, but we don't like so much to hear about our apathetic indifference concerning middle class destruction, refugee suffering, and our ongoing failure to deal fairly with 'the least of these.'

The message and meaning of Christianity includes both things we want to hear, and things we don't. That was the clear meaning of Jesus' teaching in the passage above. Jesus offers comfort and promise to the follower 'who does the will of my Father who is in heaven,' and separation from Himself in his earthly kingdom for those who 'work iniquity,' or 'practice lawlessness,' as the possibly more accurate New King James Version says. We want to hear of our acceptance into Christ's kingdom, but we don't like messages indicating our failures and their possible consequences.

The phrase 'working iniquity' implies actively and knowingly doing evil in

violation of God's law. The softer phrase "practice lawlessness" allows the entrance of ignorance and inattention as factors leading to law-breaking.

Perhaps

the softer one better describes the state of much of American Christianity today. We don't deliberately commit heinous sins against God and His people, but we do evade many principles of God's law through ignorance or inattention. Either way, there's a serious gap among Christians between what they claim to believe concerning justice and righteousness, and what they do about these issues. And it's not so much that we deliberately violate God's law, but that everything else we do seems to get in the way of acting on our faith.

Folks,

it's not about developing worship services perfect in word and song. It's not about getting more people into the church. Neither is it about gaining more contributions for ministry. These are all important in their proper place. But what it is about is preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God, including the Old as well as the New Testament, law as well as grace, responsibility as well as rights, action as well as information, and spiritual freedom rather than stultifying tradition and ritual.

This

means that the age-old message of personal salvation should include the biblical definition of salvation as not only forgiveness and eternal life, but also salvation and deliverance from oppression of all sorts---economic, social, political, religious, and familial among others.

The

coming Kingdom of God on Earth includes not only personal salvation, but every form of deliverance humankind now desperately searches for. It's not all joyful singing and worshiping; it's also reform, justice, mercy, and truth enshrined into law under Jesus Christ the King.

It's

the Jubilee message of Leviticus 25 now rising in a New World honoring rest for workers, protection for God's earth, equitable redistribution of wealth, protection for debtors, abolition of usury, and ending of all forms of involuntary human servitude. That's what it's all about! And that's why ignoring this portion of God's law so upsets the King.