

I am now home, sitting in my office reflecting on the final week of the trip. We worked in the Districts of Salima and Nchota Kota which are both near the shores of Lake Malawi. It is a beautiful area with my favorite Bao Bab trees growing sporadically along the roads. But the downside is the heat. It is the warmest area of the Central Region, nearly unbearable in the summer, and even in the winter months, a little uncomfortable for me.

On Monday, we were scheduled to work with a young congregation in Senga Bay which is less than a mile from the lake. Once again the question of fellowship between churches teaching the truth and those teaching human wisdom and tradition arose. After preaching this lesson so many times in six weeks, I have come to rely on Jesus' words of warning to His disciples, first in the Sermon on the Mount and then in His conflict with the Pharisees.

Not everyone who calls Me Lord

When we stand before Him on the final day, Jesus wanted us to know now, while we can still change it, that not everyone who relies on their confession that Jesus is Lord will be allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven. *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"* (Mt. 7:21-23).

Think about the implications of these words. When we make the choice to join ourselves to a group of people calling themselves "Christians," the fact that they call Jesus Lord is not a true indication of salvation. Even the claim that miracles, prophecy and casting out of demons are being done among them will not be enough! Jesus clearly stated that **"many"** using these things to confirm their salvation, will be told **"I never knew you."** Is there anything more fearful than those words? To spend our entire life serving Jesus and calling Him Lord, joined to a group of people who confirm all our beliefs and make us feel secure, only to hear Jesus say: **"depart from me you who practice lawlessness"** is terrifying.

What was the problem? What was the critical indicator that every disciple calling Jesus Lord must consider? Jesus stated it clearly: any disciple who **"does not do the will of My Father in heaven"** will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Calling Jesus Lord cannot undo open rebellion against God. So how do we know if our practices are God's will or something else?

If you abide in My word

Jesus helped us better understand His warning when He said, *"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (Jn. 8:31-32). The key to doing the Father's will is to abide in the words of Jesus. Only when we follow His words exclusively and with nothing added or removed are we truly *"His disciples indeed,"* and only when we abide in His words do we know the truth that can make us free. John further clarified these words in his second letter when he said, *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son"* (2Jn. 9-10). Thus any doctrine not found in the words of Jesus creates the paradox of those calling Jesus Lord, yet Jesus doesn't even know them. Anyone who refuses to be held in check by the teachings of Christ does not have God! Only those who call Jesus Lord, then abide in His teaching have both the Father and the Son.

In Vain they worship Me, Teaching as Doctrines the Commandments of Men

The method by which this problem arises is very dangerous and must be vigilantly guarded against. It is a constant danger we must always be aware of. Isaiah saw this problem among the Jews of his day and Jesus called his words a prophecy against the Pharisees. "He answered and said to them, *"Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"* This prophecy still holds great power today and we

need to use it to assess our own doctrines as well as the doctrines of others who also call themselves Christians.

Once again, like those who call Jesus Lord, we have a group of people who honor God with their lips. As we listen to their words, we are impressed with their great love and devotion to God. Yet God, who looks at the heart, sees something far different than what their words express. Their hearts were far away from the honor their lips were professing. Regardless of what they say and practice, the object of their worship had rejected them. While God could clearly see the difference, Isaiah gave us the means by which we can also see it. Anyone who teaches as doctrine (their beliefs and practices) the commands of men, and not exclusively those of God found in Scripture is rejected. Jesus rebuked them for "*laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men.*" Thus anyone who sets aside God's Word and replaces it with a command of men, honors God with their lips, but their heart is far from God. Jesus concluded with, "*All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition*" (Mk. 7:6-10).

This requires a true servant of Jesus to strip away all the traditions that have been added to the words of Jesus since the first century and remain firmly and exclusively within the teachings of Jesus. Things like infant baptism, instrumental music, or new names for the church of Christ (Rom 16:16) not found in Scripture are clear indicators of human tradition setting aside the words of Christ.

So what fellowship can there be between those who call Jesus Lord, but don't do the will of God and those who call Jesus Lord and abide in the teachings of Christ? Paul said it best: "*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?*" (2Cor. 6:14-16). Those who do the will of the Father are walking in the light and those who follow the commands of men are in the darkness. Those who do not do the will of the Father practice lawlessness, while those who abide in the teachings of Christ practice righteousness. There can be no fellowship between light and darkness for the one banishes the other. There can be no fellowship between the righteous and lawless. Hence to join with them is to be unequally yoked. Like a goat yoked to an ox or even more powerful an ox yoked to a chicken.

God is clear: "*Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.*" (2Cor 6:17). Those of us striving to remain within the teaching of Christ have nothing in common with those who have more interest in human tradition than the teachings within the Scripture.

After this lesson, we drove to Nchota-Kota, but due to the length of this report, I will save the rest of this report until next week.