

Prayer List

Wallace
Sheila
Ophelia
Josh
Daniel
Arley

Services:

Sunday

Bible Class 9:00 a.m.
Assembly 9:50 a.m.
Assembly 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday

Bible Class 7:00 p.m.

Pinole Tidings

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Elders:

Brad Behrens - bradbehrens@pinolechurchofchrist.com
Michael Odom - MichaelOdom@pinolechurchofchrist.com
Ernie Sprinkel - preacher@pinolechurchofchrist.com

This Week's Question:

What Syrian king was getting drunk at a time when he was supposed to be making war on the Samaritians?

Answer To Last Week's Question:

Mizpah - 1 Samuel 7:3-6

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Not to the Right or to the Left Joshua 1:7

By Ethan R. Longhenry

“Only be strong and very courageous, to observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest have good success whithersoever thou goest”.
(Joshua 1:7)

The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Such a line will not deviate toward any other direction. But such is really true only in ideal terms; in our reality, there is no such thing as a completely straight line. It is possible to make a line seem very straight indeed, but we cannot make a perfectly straight line. This nicely illustrates the human predicament.

God has provided a standard for living; in the old covenant, it was the Law of Moses. Ideally, Israel would hold firm to the Law, observing everything in it, not deviating at all, or, as God encouraged Joshua, and in turn Joshua the people, “to not turn from it to the right hand or to the left” (Joshua 1:7, 23:6). In the new covenant in Christ, we are to love and know God and keep His commandments, walking as Jesus walked (1 John 2:1-6). This remains the ideal.

And yet none of us can live up to that standard perfectly. Peter and Paul declared as much in regards to Israel and the Law (Acts 13:38-39, 15:10, Romans 3:20). John understands that Christians do not live up to the ideal either (1 John 1:8-2:6). If we cannot perfectly go straight, why would God provide such exhortation to Israel and to Christians today?

The ideal is not worthless or irrelevant simply because no one save Jesus has ever lived up to it perfectly. God has always understood our deficiencies as humans; such is why He established the sacrificial system in the Old Testament, and continues to grant grace and mercy through Jesus in the New Testament (cf. Leviticus, Romans 5:6-11, 8:1-39). And yet we must not become complacent or content by acknowledging our imperfection; it is easy for us to think that since we cannot live up to the ideal perfectly, we should not try! Therefore, we do well to confess that the ideal is ideal: we should be following what God says perfectly. We should walk in God's ways without any deviation; we should go "straight" and should not go "to the right hand or to the left." When we do deviate from God's command, we ought to admit as much, change our minds and ways, and return to the good path (1 John 1:9). In all things we must place our trust in God and His ideal way for mankind (Hebrews 11:6)!

The image of going "straight" and not turning "to the right hand or to the left" also underscores the necessity of balance. While it remains true that many people have deviated from God's path and purposes on account of rebellion and a desire to sin, many others have deviated from God's path because they overemphasized certain aspects of God's truth to the detriment of other aspects.

This proves quite easy to do; we humans easily go to extremes. We rightly see a problem with one side; it is

tempting to run far to the other side in response. We see certain groups associated with certain practices; it is tempting to want to go to the other extreme so that no one would confuse "us" with "them."

This is why it is important for us to remember that God wants us to not deviate to the right hand or to the left; truth is rarely, if ever, found in the extremes. Furthermore, there remain many aspects of the faith that are held in a sort of tension: God's sovereignty and grace with human freedom, for instance, or the imperative to holiness with the imperative to love, mercy, and grace. The Scriptures are filled with examples of people who have gone to one extreme or another: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the "Judaizers," the Gnostics, and so on.

God is far greater than ourselves, and His truth remains sublime (Isaiah 55:8-9, Romans 11:33-36). God has set forth His standard for the creation and all mankind; it is up to us to confess its value and make it our goal in life. Whenever we deviate from that standard, either by stumbling into some sin, or by overemphasizing certain aspects of truth to the detriment of other aspects of it, we must change our ways and seek to re-align our will to God's. God's ways and God's truth remain ideally straight, firm, and balanced; we, in our sin and corruption, have turned to the right or to the left. Let us turn away from all deviations and seek to glorify God in spirit and truth in all we think, say, do, and teach!