**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

**On KTTR (99.7 FM) Every Sunday at 8:30 a.m.**

**Rolla, Missouri**

**9/3/2023**

**Avoiding Extremes**

There seems to be a tendency among religious people to go to extremes in their beliefs and practices. They will take a truth that God has taught, but they will stretch that truth to a conclusion beyond what God intended. On our program today we want to talk about avoiding extremes. As we study God’s word to determine His will we need to avoid going to extremes in our conclusions.

First of all, as we emphasize the necessity of having the right kind of heart, having the right inward qualities in religion we must avoid extremes. The Pharisees emphasized the outward act to the neglect of inward qualities. They emphasized don’t murder and don’t commit adultery, the outward over acts, but their hearts were full of hate and deceit. They had no justice, mercy and faith (Matt. 23:27-28). They emphasized tithing and keeping the Sabbath, but on the inside they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. They emphasized the outward acts while neglecting the proper conditions of the heart. The same thing can happen to us. Our worship and service to God can degenerate into outward forms with no true love and reverence for God in the heart. Jesus said, *"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."* (John 4:24) Our worship must come from the heart. Our charitable deeds can degenerate into nothing but check writing with no true compassion and love for others. Paul said in 1 Cor. 13:3, *“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”* Partaking of the Lord Supper can just be eating some bread and drinking some grape juice with no memory of Jesus and what He did for us. Jesus said, *“Do this in remembrance of Me.”* (Luke 22:19). Baptism can be an outward act, with no real faith and penitence. Obedience needs to come from the heart (Rom. 6:17). Now, someone may be thinking, “I like that kind of preaching. We just emphasize going to church too much, and being baptized, and doing this and doing that. I just believe if your heart is right that is all that counts. What you do doesn’t really matter.” But this person goes to the opposite extreme. He is emphasizing the heart, but he is neglecting the outward actions that God has required. The fact is, whatever God has commanded, whether it involves outward action, or inward qualities of the heart, it is necessary. It is essential that we attend worship periods of the church. Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. It is essential that we partake of the bread and the fruit of the vine in remembrance of Jesus (1 Cor. 11:23-26). It is essential that one submit to baptism, an immersion in water, for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Read also Acts 22:16). All that God has commanded, whether it involves outward action or conditions of the heart are necessary. Several years ago I had a Bible study with a young lady, and I asked her if she would like to have another Bible study. She said, “No,” because she felt that we emphasized “keeping law” too much. She said we ought to talk about love for God and faith in God. I agreed with her, but I also tried to impress on her mind that we cannot emphasize a love for God without emphasizing keeping His commandments. John said in 1 John 5:3, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”* Jesus said in John 14:15, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments.”* I tried to impress on her mind that one cannot emphasize faith in Christ without emphasizing doing what He says. Jesus said in Luke 6:46, *"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?”* He said in Matt. 7:21, *"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.”* A faith in and a love for Jesus requires an emphasis on keeping His law. There must be a proper balance. The Lord has commanded certain outward actions. These actions are not optional. But they are not to be done as mere external rites. They must be done with a proper attitude of heart. In other word our service to God must be from the inside out.

Secondly, as we emphasize the grace of God, we must avoid extremes. We have emphasized in previous lessons that our hope of eternal life does not rest on our own sinless perfection. Now, we strive for perfection. The light of God’s word is our standard, and we dare not water it down. But we also realize that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Whether one falls a little short or far short of God’s standard, we are all dependent upon God’s grace for our salvation. Paul says in Eph. 2:8, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”*  We cannot save ourselves. We are saved through the death of Christ. Romans 5:8-9 says, *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.”* When a sinner comes to Jesus with an obedient faith, then he can be saved. We are not saved by our perfect keeping of the law, but by God’s grace and mercy.

But someone may be thinking, “I like that kind of preaching. God is a loving, forgiving God. Yes, we sin, but His is grace covers our sins. He’s not going to send me to hell just because I commit sin.” And so this person interprets God’s grace as a license to sin. So temptation arises, he gives in – “after all, God will forgive; nobody’s perfect.” He willfully misses the worship periods of the church. He uses some foul language at work. He drinks and may get drunk. He visits pornographic websites. He thinks that since God saves by grace that he can commit these sins and God will save him anyway. This is going to the opposite extreme.

There are two extremes. Your remember, the Pharisees, on one extreme, believed they were righteous on the merits of their strict adherence to the Law and did not see their need for the grace of God. But then on the other extreme are those who interpret the grace of God to mean a license to sin. They believe they are saved by God’s grace even though they willfully commit sin. Both extremes are wrong.

Man is not saved by his own meritorious works, but while God forgives us when we sin, He does not grant permission to commit even one sin. Let me illustrate. At most dinner tables, occasionally someone will knock over a glass of tea or water and cause a big mess. Regrets are expressed. The person who did the deed is forgiven. But let’s say that someone at the dinner table asked if he or she could knock over a glass of water. We would say, “No! Absolutely not.” And if carelessness developed, we would correct the careless one. In a similar way, when a Christian commits sin and repents, God forgives him by His grace, but God’s grace doesn’t give the Christian permission to commit the sin. 1 John 1:5-9 says, *“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* A person who walks in darkness, that is he continues in sin, does not have fellowship with God. The one who is cleansed of his sins is the one who walks in the light as He is in the light. This is the one who confesses his sins. He does not overlook his sins, but he deals with his sins by repenting of them and confessing them. A balance is needed. We must recognize our own sinfulness and come to God daily with a penitent heart to accept His grace. But when we do come with a penitent heart we will then make a determined effort to put off the sinful practice and be holy as He who called us is holy.

And then thirdly, in our emphasis on heaven and God’s goodness, we must avoid extremes.

There is strong motivation to serve God in talking about His goodness and in talking about heaven. These motivate us to live for Him. Paul mentions this in Roman 2:4 when he says, “*Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”* The goodness of God motivates us to repent and turn to Him. If reminders of Jesus’ suffering and death for us does not cause us to want to give our lives to Him, then what will? The love and goodness of God, and the hope of heaven should be where we place our emphasis as our strongest motives to serve Him. I wonder about someone who is always talking about hell. Everything he does, he does to avoid hell.

But someone may be thinking, “I like that kind of teaching. I like to think of God as good and loving, and you know, a loving and merciful God would not send anyone to hell.” But this is going to the opposite extreme. Yes, we must emphasize the love and goodness of God, but the Bible also talks about the fear of hell. The Bible speaks of both the goodness and severity of God. Paul said in Romans 11:22, *“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.”* There are some who find it hard to believe that both goodness and severity can exist in God. But we would do well to remember that God is two-fold in character. He is a God of mercy, but He is also a God of justice. There could be no justice without some severity, because justice means that the judge will render to every man according to his deeds. This is what God does. Romans 2:5-6 says, *“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’.”* Remember Adam and Eve. God punished them when they disobeyed. When Nadab and Abihu offered fire that God had not commanded, fire went out from the Lord and devoured them (Lev. 10:1-2). The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah refused to repent and the Lord rained brimstone and fire on them and destroyed them (Gen. 19:24-25). God’s word is clear – God demands our respect and obedience, and failure to yield to Him will result in severe punishment.

Today we have been looking at some areas in which we need to avoid extremes. As we emphasize the necessity of inward qualities in religion we must avoid the extreme of emphasizing the heart to the neglect of obeying those command that involve outward action. As we emphasize salvation by God’s grace we must avoid the extreme of interpreting God’s grace as a license to sin. As we emphasize God’s goodness and his promise of going to heaven, we must avoid the extreme of rejecting God’s justice and His judgment for sin. We must accept all that God says.

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