

## Christianity is a Taught Religion

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### Introduction:

I imagine it was a sunny day. Jesus and His disciples had come onto a mountain by the Sea of Galilee, followed by a huge crowd of about 5000 men, not counting women and children. Jesus turned to Philip and asked how he planned to feed the crowd. Philip explained that if he had 200 days' wages he could not feed that massive crowd. Andrew told Jesus of a boy who had five barley loaves and two fish, but how could that feed the crowd? Jesus had the people sit down and divided the food among them. After everyone had eaten, He sent the apostles throughout the crowd to pick up the scraps. Each one filled a basket with leftovers. Following this miracle, the crowd determined Jesus ought to be their king. However, He slipped away. Jesus went up into the mountain to be alone and sent His apostles across the sea. In the middle of the night, Jesus walked across the sea and met His disciples while still on the water. The next day, the crowds crossed the sea to where the disciples and Jesus had gone. Then Jesus did a very interesting thing. Instead of feeding the crowds again, He rebuked them. They did not follow Him because they learned He was from God, but because they wanted food. Jesus explained He was the spiritual food God had sent. If they wanted to live eternally they should eat His flesh and drink His blood. The crowds grumbled at this statement and Jesus explained He was speaking spiritually, not literally. The masses abandoned Him because they were so turned off by His teaching. His closest disciples remained, demonstrating that they understood what Jesus was saying. They would not leave because they knew He was the Holy One of God who had the words of eternal life.

This is a very familiar story to us—at least parts of it are. Regrettably, we usually only read of the amazing miracle and do not notice it in context. The story of feeding the five thousand found in **John 6** was not written just to tell us about Jesus' power. Rather it demonstrated the means by which God planned on saving the world. It demonstrates the means by which God expects us to spread His religion, Christianity, drawing people to Him. Regrettably, because most people, even Christians, never get passed reading about the miraculous feeding, they often try to draw people to the Father in ways that this very chapter rebuffs.

### Discussion:

- I. Christianity is a **taught** religion.
  - A. At the conclusion of this narrative, Peter drove home the point of the whole story. He said in **John 6:68**, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life." The masses had misunderstood. They thought the important thing about Jesus was that He fed them (**John 6:26**). Peter understood the important thing was He taught them. He gave them words of life.
  - B. In **John 6:44**, Jesus explained the only way to God is to be drawn to Him. Then in **vs. 45**, He explained how God does His drawing. "And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me." God does His drawing through teaching. Christianity is a taught religion.
  - C. **Psalms 119:97-104** discusses this issue of being taught of God. Being taught of God does not equal hearing God's voice in our heads. It means loving God's law, meditating on His commandments and testimonies, observing and gaining understanding from His precepts.
  - D. Here is the crux of the matter. We can read a lot of books and get a lot of opinions on the best way to evangelize our community. We can have all manner of special events or attractive draws. However, there is only one way to bring people to God. They must be taught God's will. The same is true for our children. There is only one way our children will grow up in the faith. We must teach it to them. There is no substitute for actual teaching.
- II. Christianity is not a **fought** religion.
  - A. In **John 6:15**, Jesus perceived that the people were going to force Him to be king. We must keep this in the historical context. Under the Roman Empire, declaring Jesus to be king was rebellion that would start a war between those who decided to follow Jesus and those who decided to follow Caesar. However, that was not Jesus' plan. By slipping away and avoiding this coronation, Jesus demonstrated Christianity is not a fought religion. In **John 18:36**, Jesus taught that His kingdom is not of this world, which is why His disciples do not stand up and fight.

- B. Look throughout history and around the world as we see people who have thought Christianity is a fought religion. The civil war in Ireland, the Crusades of the middle ages and the Spanish Inquisition were all propagated by people who thought the way to spread Christianity was with the sword. Today, the approach is slightly different, but the motivation is the same. How many think the way to spread Christianity is on the floor of Congress. Too many think the answer to our nation's problems is to fight over legislation. The fact is, we can change all our laws to follow the Bible, but until we change the hearts of people through teaching the Gospel, they will still be lost sinners. Christianity is not a fought religion but a taught religion.
- C. Consider Paul's words to Timothy in **II Timothy 2:24-26**. The bond-servant of the Lord is not to be quarrelsome, but rather, able to teach and able to correct others with gentleness. Too many folks view personal evangelism as a fight. They are out to put all the people who are wrong in their place. That must not be our goal. Our goal must simply be to teach what the scripture says. That is not to say there will never be debate or argument. Rather, it is simply a statement of motivation. Some people cannot wait to get into a good fight about the Bible. The bond-servant of the Lord cannot wait to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- D. Look also to our homes. The passing on of Christianity is not to be a fight. It is not about parents forcing their kids in the right way. Rather, Christianity is to be taught. If more parents would spend their children's early lives teaching them the truth, they wouldn't have to spend so much of their older lives fighting with them about it.

### III. Christianity is not a **bought** religion.

- A. I am often amazed that some Christians turn to **John 6** to favor fellowship halls, food drives and inner city give-aways as a means of drawing folks to God. Jesus had fed the masses—that is certain. However, Jesus was not feeding them as a means to draw them to His teaching; He was performing a miracle to draw them to His divinity. When they found Jesus the next day, though, He demonstrated that they missed the point. According to **John 6:26**, they wanted more food. This tells us why they wanted Jesus as king—not because He was God in the flesh; but because He could feed them. Jesus refused to feed them again. When He told them they should believe on Him (**vs. 29**), they asked for a sign that would cause them to believe. After all, Moses gave the people manna every day (**vs. 30-31**). But Jesus was not willing to buy the crowd. Christianity is not a bought religion. What good would it be if they followed for the food? Instead of buying their discipleship with food, He simply taught them and left it up to them whether or not they wanted to follow Him.
- B. This is perhaps the most common approach used today to get people into the church. Regrettably, even many Christians have bought into this mindset. Too many think that if we could just have a fellowship hall, a family life center or a gymnasium—people would come for all that we offer. If we had meals, weight watchers classes, alcoholics anonymous, karate, aerobics, plays or concerts, then we could get people here. It is almost as if churches are saying, "Look at what we will give you if you join us." However, Jesus demonstrated that Christianity is not a bought religion. He does not want the service of those who have to be paid off. He wants volunteers.
- C. Regrettably, this is also the method more and more people are relying on to get their kids to become Christians. How many today think the answer for saving our kids is to have some amazing youth group that provides entertainment, recreation and fun. Too many people want churches to provide fun and games for their kids. They want trips to Six Flags, pizza parties and retreats. Then, when their kids leave home they wonder why they don't stick with a church that teaches the truth but go to the one which offers the most fun. As the old preachers used to say, "If you hotdog someone in, another church will eventually hamburger them out." I am amazed at the number of people who ask of churches, "What do you have to offer my children?" We have the saving message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. If that is not enough, we cannot help you.

### IV. Christianity is not a **caught** religion.

- A. Something we see from **John 6** as a whole, though it is not addressed with a direct verse, is that Christianity is not a caught religion. Christianity is not something people catch because they are in close proximity to other Christians. These masses of people were following Jesus around,

but that did not make them true believers. Not to mention the one apostle who spent three years with Jesus and would betray Him, referred to in **John 6:70-71**.

- B. Despite this, numerous people act as though the main thing is just to get people in the church building and hanging around with us and eventually they will catch the Christianity virus. This is the mindset that asks preachers not to preach on the doctrines that distinguish us from all the mixed religion that professes to be Christianity but does not really follow the Bible. This is the mindset that promotes entertainment oriented worship. This is the mindset that pushes to make worship a knock-out, drop-dead, emotional experience. This is also the mindset that many Christians use to avoid actually doing real personal work. How many times have Christians promoted the virtues of teaching by example? Certainly, we should be an example to others in our behavior. They should see our light shining and thereby glorify God (**Matthew 5:16**). However, no one can learn the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ just from our example. They cannot know the sacrifice that was made just because we live holy lives. They do not know the initial response of faith, confession, repentance and baptism just by seeing how we behave on the job. Christianity is not a caught religion, it is a taught religion.
- C. I think this is the most dangerous approach that parents take to converting their children. Too many of us parents believe all that is necessary is getting our kids to church all their lives. I do not know how many parents of fallen children have asked, "Where did I go wrong, I brought them to church their whole lives?" They then blame the elders or the preacher for not being involved in their kid's lives enough. Or they say it is the church's fault for not having a youth group. My question to parents is not do you have your kids in a church that is doing anything for your kids. My question is, how much are you teaching your children? Your kids will not catch Christianity just because they grow up coming to this church. They will become Christians if they are taught and they believe it. Sadly, many churches are buying into this mindset. Bible classes are planned not based on what can be taught but on how much fun we can have to get the kids to come back again. When what we do with our kids is more predicated on how much fun it is in order to get them to come back again, instead of how much they will learn to help them get to heaven, we have lost sight of our mission as a church. Our job is not to buy the attendance of kids (or anyone else for that matter) in hopes that they will catch Christianity; our job is to teach Christ's gospel. Christianity is not a caught religion, it is a taught religion.

V. The realities of a taught religion.

- A. There is a reason why so many are drawn to the trappings of fought, bought or caught Christianity. The reason is that most people think a taught Christianity is boring. We live in an age of emotional experience. A church that focuses on teaching looks a little too much like school. Teaching and learning looks a little too much like work. Most people don't want it.
- B. One of the big church growth slogans today is to look at the successful churches around us and see what God is blessing and jump on His bandwagon. The key to knowing if God is blessing it is to see the crowds of people lining up. That is interesting, because Jesus did not take that approach in **John 6**. If He had taken that approach, He would have fought, bought or caught. After all, people were lined up to hang out, they were lined up to get free food, they were lined up to make Him king. But when Jesus refused all of this and just taught them, trying to open their minds to saving faith in Him, the people abandoned Him (**John 6:66**). Isn't that amazing? Jesus had somewhere between five and ten thousand people following Him and He let them all slip away because He wanted to propagate a taught Christianity.
- C. Here is the reality for us. If we decide to take Jesus' approach and pursue a taught Christianity, the masses will not follow us either. As Jesus said in **Matthew 7:13-14**, most people do not want to follow the narrow way in Christ. They want the broad way. That is why the masses turned away from Jesus and that is why they will turn away from us today. However, we have reason to rejoice. Those who stick around, though they may be few, will receive the words of life (**John 6:68-69**). They will be the ones who have been taught and truly become Christians.
- D. When it comes to our children, I think we have often looked at the wrong statistics. It is very easy to look around at all the churches that are busy with fought, bought and caught religion and how big their youth groups are. My question is how many in those youth groups are actually sticking with it when they get away from home—in college and beyond? The sad answer is that

few do. The thing about this that concerns me the most is the way we train our children will affect their view of spirituality and serving God their entire lives. If we train them up pursuing fought, bought or caught Christianity, we are going to have an extremely hard time getting them to switch to a taught Christianity when they are older. That is one of the reasons so many young people turn to institutional churches and other forms of liberalism.

**Conclusion:**

What kind of religion are you interested in? Jesus is interested in a teaching religion. He has a gospel message of salvation that is more important and more exciting than anything else out there, if we will simply be drawn by the words of life. I guess the real question is how important are the words of life to us? Are they enough for us or do we want something more than that? The end of the matter is this, only the words of life will save us, let us focus on them and pass them along.