

It's Really That Simple

By: David Burruss

A few weeks ago, I wrote an article with the simple idea to let Scripture speak, and not the opinions or the traditions of men. I expected a little pushback for sure, but I was a little surprised to see how much feedback I received on Facebook. Most of it came from people who were doing exactly what the article addressed. Instead of letting God's word decide the matter, they responded with more of their own reasoning to explain why they thought it shouldn't. I tried to state it as straightforward as I could, so I'll try again here to restate it even plainer than I did before.

If you hear the word of God, and you believe who He is and that He cannot lie, then you should simply follow His instructions. That is the whole matter. It is not complicated, and it was never meant to be.

It does not start with an argument about hermeneutics or a debate over interpretation. It starts with a question about God Himself. Balaam, of all people, understood this when he told Balak, "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19). Paul says the same thing from the other side of the cross, describing our hope as resting "in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began" (Titus 1:2). The writer of Hebrews goes even further, saying it is "impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18). Not unlikely. Not merely out of character, but impossible.

When this takes root in the heart, everything else begins to fall into place. If God cannot lie, then whatever He has said is not simply something which we feel is untrue based on our preferences, our upbringing, or the church we grew up in. It is simply not the case that He has said something which contradicts itself. To hear it and not act upon it is a contradiction of what we claim to believe about the One who has spoken.

James put this bluntly: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). The deception he describes is not aimed outward at other people. It is self-deception, the quiet lie we tell ourselves that hearing counts as obeying. Jesus made the same point to a crowd that admired His teaching without submitting to it. "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). He followed the question with the well-known picture of two builders, one who dug deep and laid a foundation on rock, and one who built without a foundation at all. Both heard the same words. Only one obeyed them, and only his house stood when the flood came (Luke 6:47-49). The difference between the two builders was never their understanding of the sermon. It was their response to it.

Scripture gives us a picture of what simple obedience looks like in the story of Naaman, the Syrian commander with leprosy who came to Elisha expecting some complex ritual (2 Kings 5). Instead, the instruction he received was plain: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean" (2 Kings 5:10). Naaman was furious. He expected something that matched his own sense of what should work, and this was not it. It took his servants to talk him down, and it took his own willingness to set his reasoning aside and simply do what he had been told. He went down, dipped seven times in the Jordan, and was healed. Nothing in the story suggests the water had any special power. The healing came from obedience to God's word, not from Naaman's understanding of why it worked.

That story is worth sitting with, because it exposes something in all of us. We tend to trust our own sense of what makes sense more than we trust a plain instruction we did not come up with ourselves. And once a person starts filtering God's word through what already feels right to them, the outcome is predictable. Jesus described it in the Pharisees of His day: "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men... All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition" (Mark 7:8-9).

Ultimately, the problem wasn't the lack of a working knowledge of Scripture, but a quiet substitution of an easier alternative. This principle is what Paul saw in the Colossians, where he warned against being deceived by human reasoning and the teachings of the world rather than Christ (Colossians 2:8). In both instances, the problem was not a lack of Scripture. Rather, it was a subtle substitution.

The pushback was not surprising because Paul told Timothy plainly that a time would come when people would not "endure sound doctrine," but would gather teachers who told them what their "itching ears" wanted to hear, turning away from truth toward fables of their own choosing (2 Timothy 4:3-4). That is not a description of unbelievers rejecting the Bible outright. It is a description of people who still want to be considered faithful while reshaping the word to fit what they already intended to do. Jesus said something similar to His critics: "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God" (John 8:47). The hearing He speaks of was never about having ears that function. It was about a heart willing to receive what was said, even when it costs something.

This contrasts with the Bereans. They listened to Paul and "received the word with all readiness and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). They were not gullible, nor were they lazy readers. They tested what they heard against the Scriptures. They didn't take Paul's word and follow it blindly, and they didn't take Paul's word and follow it arrogantly. They tested Scripture and built their personal faith with it, and this is the pattern we should imitate.

None of this requires a complicated argument. It requires a settled conviction that God does not lie, followed by the willingness to do what He said, even when we would have written the instructions differently ourselves. Naaman did not need to understand the Jordan River. He needed to get in it. The rest of us are not so different. The instructions are in front of us. The only real question is whether we believe the One who gave them enough to obey.