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MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY

A popular quotation in some circles these days is “my way or the highway.” In some ways we in America are turning into a society that believes that individual rights supercede the rights of society. If you don’t see it the way I see it, you are free to leave. From both a practical and a scriptural standpoint there are some things wrong with this attitude.

The obvious failing of this attitude is that it fills the highways. To paraphrase A. Lincoln, you may agree with all of the people some of the time and some of the people all of the time, but you won’t agree with all of the people all of the time. There comes a time when each of us disagrees with even our closest friends. If we take the “my way” attitude, then everyone else will be on the highway away from us (and that just might be a good thing). Relationships suffer. When you get a hundred or more people together the probability of agreement among all of them goes down to practically nil. In the church, that means that if everyone took this attitude we would have thousands of congregations of one person each. Jesus promised to be where “two or more are gathered in my name.” (Matt 18:20) Obviously he didn’t expect the people in his church to insist on their own way in everything.

I have seen a sort of reverse of this quotation in some congregations. Someone will say instead, “My way, or I hit the highway.” As I said in another article (“Too Many Congregations”, May 2003) this is one of the advantages/dangers of having more than one congregation in a town. If someone doesn’t like the new color chosen for the auditorium walls, the new deacon, a new program for the church, or any other thing, he can act like the child who didn’t get picked for the team he wanted and say “I’m going to take my ball and go home.” When just one person or one family leaves a congregation the problem may not be serious. When a whole segment of the congregation leaves, particularly if it is acrimonious, then the attitude has violated scripture, particularly if the division is over doctrine and not opinion.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. (Rom 16:17-18)

At best, even if the disagreement isn’t over one man’s doctrine, serious disagreements between Christians show the wrong face to the world. It is not the face of Jesus. “By this shall men know ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (Jn 13:35) When it gets to the point that we have to split, that one has to take to the highway, we are not showing love to the world.

Another thing wrong with the “my way” attitude is that most of us have no idea of what the right way is. “It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” (Jer 10:23) When we try to do things our way, we forget God’s way.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa 55:8-9)

The auld song says, “Ye’ll take the high road and I’ll take the low road.” The problem is, when we want to do it our way, we are taking the low road to death. When it comes down to my way or God’s way, my way just is not good enough. Between the two choices, our motto should be “my way or the High Way.”

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THE JESUS CLOAK

In the first of the Harry Potter books, young Mr. Potter is given a cloak that, when donned, makes the wearer invisible. Christians also have just such a magical cloak. Once they put on this cloak, not only are they invisible, but they are also endowed with certain other special qualities. Paul talks about this cloak in Galatians 3:27, saying, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." When we put on the "Jesus Cloak" a number of changes occur.

The Cloak of Invisibility

The first thing that we notice is that we truly become invisible. The people around us no longer see us. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven." (Matt 5:16) If we are wearing the Jesus cloak, they glorify God because they see Him, not us, in our actions. Granted, the cloak doesn't render us immediately invisible to

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no longer digestible.

people. After Paul put on Christ, some people thought they saw him, still, but soon came to see only Christ.

But all that heard him were amazed, and said;
Is not this he that destroyed them which
called on this name in Jerusalem, and came
hither for that intent, that he might bring them
bound unto the chief priests? But Saul
increased the more in strength, and
confounded the Jews which dwelt at
Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.
(Acts 9:21-22)

Not only do we become invisible to other people, we become invisible to God. God knows we are sinners. God must judge sinners. So He goes looking for us to judge us. Because we are wearing the Jesus Cloak, God no longer finds us, because we are invisible. All He can see when He looks at us is Jesus, His son. More particularly, he sees the blood of His son, which has removed all our sin.

Some people talk of the blood "hiding" our sin. The great thing about our cloak is not that our sin is hidden; it no longer exists at all. You can't hide something that has ceased to exist. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one

with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 Jn 1:7) When doing our floors, commercials tell us, we don't want a cleanser that just covers up the dirt; we want one that removes it. We don't want an air freshener that just covers up odors; we want one that removes them. So it is with the cleansing of the blood of Christ. We don't want to hide our sins; we want them removed. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." (Ps 103:12)

A Change of Sustenance

When we put on this cloak, we not only disappear; we change. One area of change is what feeds us. There was a Star Trek episode in which some of the crew were somehow exchanged for their counterparts in a "mirror" universe. They could not survive on the food in their new surroundings because the molecules were "backward" to their system. Our own science has accomplished the same thing, having created a sugar substitute that is a basic sugar molecule that our system can not digest because it is backward to our systems. When we are wearing Jesus we are in just such a "Mirror, Mirror" situation. What previously fed us is no longer digestible. "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and *make not provision* for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." (Rom 13:14, my italics) When provisioning for our camp-out in this world, we ignore the lusts of the flesh, because we can no longer stomach them.

As with a newborn, we have to learn to eat the new food. We may take a while before the cloak of Jesus has fully changed our systems. "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. ³For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Cor 3:2-3) There comes a time, however, when we should be getting our sustenance fully from our new food. "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe." (Heb 5:12-13)

Seeing Through Jesus' Eyes

Years ago there was a Faye Dunaway movie called "The Eyes of Laura Mars." In it the main character "saw" murders as they were happening. As it turns out,

she was seeing them through the eyes of the killer, even when he started stalking her. This is how we should be, except we should be looking through the eyes of one who was killed instead of the eyes of a killer. When we look at something, we should be looking through the eyes of Jesus.

To understand what it means to look through the eyes of Jesus, perhaps we ought to see what it is like not to do so.

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matt 6:22)

When we look through our own eyes, all we see is darkness. We see sin. "Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin." (2 Pet 2:14) Our own eyes are blind.

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. (Matt 13:13-15)

Paul's conversion (Acts 9) is a parable of how we should be seeing. Paul thought he had clear sight. He thought he knew God's will. He was putting Christians (at that time all being Jewish) in jail in Jerusalem. On his way to Damascus to take more Christians into custody he saw God. When he got up from the ground, "when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus. And he was three days without sight." (Acts 9:8-9) His eyes were opened to the fact that his eyes were blind. A man came and preached to him and his sight was restored. He was immersed to wash away his sins, and after that he saw the word of God clearly. Like Paul, before we follow "the way" of truth, we are blind; we just don't always realize it. Then our eyes are opened. We see what we need to do, and when we do it we begin to see through Jesus' eyes.

What do we see when we look through his eyes? We know what he sees. "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." (1 Pet 3:12) When we see through his eyes we see righteousness. We see what is right for us, but of equal importance we see righteousness in others. We don't look for the worst in

people, but the best. We also see what we need to do about it. "Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." (Jn 4:35) Through Jesus' eyes we see souls searching for the truth we have come to know. We see that we have to act on that vision, and work for the harvest. When we look through his eyes we see all kinds of marvelous things.

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe. (Eph 1:18-19)

Thinking Jesus' Thoughts

Finally, brethren, when we wear the cloak that is Jesus, we start to think different thoughts.

Paul urged that we have "the mind of Christ." (1 Cor 2:16) What is that mind? He detailed what that was to the believers in Philippi.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

Paul's eyes were opened to the fact that his eyes were blind.

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Php 2:5-8)

No longer do we think about ourselves, we put others first. "By this shall all know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one to another." (Jn 13:35) We don't expect others to "give us our due;" we have been sinners who are due nothing but death. Now we are saved, but still are owed nothing. Instead we owe everything. (Rom 8:11-12)

Instead of expecting something from others, our new mind, the mind of Christ, says to give. After all, Christ gave up everything for us. If we wear the Jesus cloak, we will give up for others. But just as Jesus gave it up, only to be exalted above his former status, so we, if we wear him, will be exalted beyond what we could imagine. And all because we put on "the Jesus cloak."

THE RED HEIFER

Numbers 19 gives the law of the red heifer. In summary, it says that the priest shall sacrifice an unblemished red heifer that has never been yoked. The heifer was to be burned in his presence, and cedar, hyssop, and scarlet thread were to be thrown on the fire once it was burning. The ashes were to be gathered and carefully stored as “a purification for sin.” When any person touched a dead body, animal or human, they were unclean for seven days. On the third and seventh days they were to present themselves for sprinkling. A clean person would fill a container from a source of running water, then add ashes from the red heifer. He would use hyssop to sprinkle the unclean person. If this was done on the third and seventh days, and the unclean person immersed himself, then he became clean. The part that had stumped many scholars, supposedly including Solomon, is that the clean person who sprinkled the water and ashes then became unclean until evening. The clean person who sprinkles the waters becomes unclean, while the one who is sprinkled with the waters becomes clean.

The person who was sprinkled did not merely become ritually clean. God considered his flesh to be completely and effectively clean. That impurity would be remembered no more. It was not even to be remembered at the Day of Atonement, because it was totally gone.

Since most Christians today don't need to worry about the laws of ritual purity that the Jews had to concern themselves with, many might ask what significance the red heifer has to us. So it

brought purity to the impure, and impurity to the pure. So what?

Actually, the law of the red heifer had more to do with us as Christians than most people realize. It has everything to do with our salvation. I know, we are saved by the faith of Christ. The blood of the sacrificed Son of God cleanses us, not the ashes of a red heifer. Still, the idea presented in Deuteronomy 19 is central to that cleansing.

In science it is the law of conservation of energy. Energy may be transferred, but it is neither created nor destroyed. In relation to sin, the law of the red heifer says that sin may be transferred but not destroyed. Why is that important to us? Because it explains why Jesus, the Messiah, died on the cross. It says that my sin had to be transferred to a clean person or else I would be “cut off” from God's people. Since there was no other person without sin (Heb 4:15), the only one who could effect the transfer was Jesus.

Jesus is our red heifer. More correctly, he is the clean person who sprinkled with the ashes of the red heifer. He became unclean for us. He took our sin on himself, that we might be pure. The ashes of the red heifer purified the flesh; he purifies our spirit.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

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