

“Lord, Lord”

I once heard a story of a country preacher who went to visit a man who had made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and had joined in membership to a local church but, only came to the worship services on Easter and Christmas. The pastor hoped to persuade this man to become more involved in the life of the Church. When the pastor arrived at the man’s house he was on his patio preparing to cook some steaks on a charcoal grill. After some initial small talk, the pastor finally asked, “Why do you only come to church once or twice a year?” The man replied that he didn’t really feel that he needed to be in church. He explained it this way: “I’m a Christian and I can meet with God anywhere, even out here in the great outdoors.”

After listening to the man’s defense of his actions, the pastor went over to the charcoal fire, took a pair of tongs, removed one of the coals and carried it over to a brick about ten feet away. He asked the man to watch the charcoal briquette, isolated from the rest of the coals. The pastor then said these words, “You see, when you take a single coal out of the group of coals it loses its warmth. It loses its fire. You may think that you can get along without the body of Christ, without the means of grace connected to the local church (Eph. 4:1-16). But, scripture teaches us that when God saves a person, although that salvation is very personal, it’s also corporate. We need to be in a healthy, local church for the word, sacraments, corporate prayer and fellowship—all needed for our spiritual health and well-being.”

This story is not meant to be an infallible statement about the true spiritual condition of every person who has—for a time—drifted away from the local church. But the story does illustrate that—it’s not just what we say—but our daily choices which may reveal the true condition of our soul. Some polls suggest that as high as 85% of the people in America claim to be Christian. Although this is impressive, the reality is that number is surely much lower. There are many who claim to have a right relationship with God in Jesus Christ who, almost certainly, do not.

This series of articles will address a portion of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew’s gospel about the reality of spiritual deception. Jesus teaches us that there are those who will stand in the Day of Judgment, believing themselves to be a Christian who will hear these tragic words from Jesus, “I never knew you.” Listen to Jesus’ words from Matthew 7:21: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.....” Let’s take a moment to begin to unpack Jesus’ teaching in this passage.

The Greek word translated “Lord” is used a number of different ways in the New Testament. In one sense the word can be used as a type of respectful address, e.g., “sir.” (see John 12:21; Acts 16:30). The Romans used this word for a title for their emperor (Acts 25:26). In other places the word can rightly be translated, “master” or even “owner.” (Mt. 6:24; 20:8). In our text in Matthew, the word is used in the sense of Jesus, himself, as the “Lord” and “Master” of his true disciples.

The repeated words, “Lord, Lord” actually seem to emphasize their self-deception. The clear teaching from Jesus in this passage is that there will be people on “that day”—the final Judgment Day—who have wrongly convinced themselves that Jesus is their Lord and Master only to hear, “depart from me...” Tragically, there are “many” who’re serving the wrong Lord and Master—generally themselves—who have a false belief about their true condition. This type of idolatry usually expresses itself in saying, “I’ll decide for myself,” rather than obeying the word of God. Notice that Jesus is not condemning the recognition of him as “Lord.” But merely repeating the words, “Lord, Lord”—as if repetition will serve to convince us—is not sufficient. It’s not just what we say with our mouths but also what we do with our lives. It’s not merely the one who says, “Lord, Lord,” who’ll enter the kingdom of heaven but “the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (vs. 21). If we have truly believed in Jesus Christ as our Savior, by faith, we will seek to obey the will of God revealed in Holy Scripture which includes a healthy connection to a faithful, local church (Heb. 10:25).

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