

4. How, what, and why

February 5, 2015

When we were in school, we learned that if we wanted to find out the fact objectively, we need to use 5Ws and 1H – Who, Where, When, What, Why, and How. I still use this method for the outlining process in my Inductive Bible Study without my interpretations or applications. While I read the texts from the Bible, I often write down what the Lord is telling me from the Scripture in a concise manner. Then from there, I look for interpretations and applications.

In my opinion, the most important portion of the 5Ws and 1H in the Christian life is “WHY.” We can be utter hypocritical sinners and fool everyone around us with our double life and do good things at the right place and right time for the right people. The people around us would say, “Woo,” and “Ah!!!” But we cannot fool our omniscient God who sees all of our “WHYs.” The motives in our hearts for each decision and action are clearly revealed in the eyes of our God.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

I strongly believe that this fire that tests the motives of every Christian's work is the eyes of our God. We cannot pull the wool over our God's eyes.

It is far more important for us to do our worship and service to the Lord with the right reason for the Lord than to impress the people around us. If we don't, the Lord will reveal the truth at the extremely inconvenient time.

A. THE BROKEN COVENANT

Jeremiah 11:1-5 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, 2 "Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; 3 and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Cursed is the man who does not obey the words of this covenant 4 which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, 'Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God,' 5 that I may establish the oath which I have sworn to your fathers, to give them 'a land flowing with milk and honey,' as it is this day.'"" And I answered and said, "So be it, Lord."

The ancient Israelis during the time of king Josiah, one of the few godly kings in the Southern Kingdom, Judah were following the lead of their king, not because they wanted, but because they'd like to keep their heads on their bodies. The cleansing of the kingdom was known as “Josiah's reformation,” not “the people's reformation of Judah.” Their hearts were still holding onto their idols and they would turn back to their idolatry at the first opportunity. And they did as soon as Josiah died.

We can easily come up with the four major covenants between the Lord and the ancient Israelis:

1) The Abrahamic Covenant – Genesis 15:18-21

It is the basis for all the blessings Israel has received from the Lord. It is an unconditional promise.

2) The Mosaic Covenant – Exodus 19-20

This one involved obedience to His holy law. Though the Israelis promised to the Lord that they would obey His commands, they disobeyed Him while they were still at Sinai by making a gold calf idol and worshiped it. It is a conditional promise.

3) **The Book of Deuteronomy** – The literal meaning of ‘Deuteronomy’ is “repetition of the law.” As the longest farewell speech recorded, Moses reminded the Israelis of their obligation to the Lord when they entered into the Promised Land. The ownership of the land depended on God’s promise to Abraham, but their possession of the land was up to their obedience to the Lord. It also is a conditional promise.

4) The Davidic Covenant – 2 Samuel 7

This was made between God and David through which God promises David and Israel that the Messiah (Jesus Christ) would come from the lineage of David and the tribe of Judah and would establish a kingdom that would endure forever. This is an unconditional covenant. The surety of the promises made rests solely on God’s faithfulness and does not depend at all on David or Israel’s obedience.

Prophet Jeremiah knew the Lord and His faithfulness to bring forth blessings to His people Israelis as well as judgment for their disobedience. He was not thinking that God would wink at their sins like the rest of the Israeli people. The prophet knew that God’s judgment would be thorough and extensive, but His judgment would bring out the right results. That’s why he could say, “So be it, Lord” which we know as “Amen, Lord.”

Our Amen to the Lord should be more than a mere acknowledgement, it should be more than a half-hearted agreement. It should be a fully accepted embrace from our heart for whatever the Lord choose to do. The hymn writer of “It is well with my soul”, Horatio Spafford understood it. Though he could not understand the reason for the loss of all of his daughters in the Atlantic Ocean, but he believed in the sovereignty of our God.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

B. KILL THE MESSENGER

Jeremiah 11:18-23 Now the Lord gave me knowledge of it, and I know it; for You showed me their doings. 19 But I was like a docile lamb brought to the slaughter; and I did not know that they had devised schemes against me, saying, “Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be remembered no more.” 20 But, O Lord of hosts, You who judge righteously, Testing the mind and the heart, Let me see Your vengeance on them, For to You I have revealed my cause. 21 “Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the men of Anathoth who seek your life, saying, ‘Do not prophesy in the name of the Lord, lest you die by our hand’-- 22 therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Behold, I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword, their sons and their daughters shall die by famine; 23 and there shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring catastrophe on the men of Anathoth, even the year of their punishment.’”

Isn’t that typical? The men of Anathoth, Jeremiah’s hometown, didn’t like the message they got from the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah, so they conspired to kill

the messenger. I am sure that the Lord would change His mind because He was scared and everything would go well.

Rather than repenting of their sins, they decided to get rid of this pain-in-the-neck prophet who always gave them God's impending judgment through Babylon, while the false prophets were declaring "Peace, peace."

While I was preparing this portion of the message, I couldn't help myself from thinking of Joel Osteen and his shallow feel-good messages. I believe that he leads more Christians and non-Christians to self-deception and self-destruction with his false hope messages than any other anti-Christianity personnel.

C. A QUESTION "WHY?"

Jeremiah 12:1-3 Righteous are You, O Lord, when I plead with You; Yet let me talk with You about Your judgments. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously? 2 You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; They grow, yes, they bear fruit. You are near in their mouth But far from their mind. 3 But You, O Lord, know me; You have seen me, And You have tested my heart toward You. Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, And prepare them for the day of slaughter.

Jeremiah 12:5 "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, Then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, In which you trusted, they wearied you, Then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?"

The question Jeremiah was asking here was asked by many other faithful believers of Christ as well as all of us, at one time or another, if you can reflect your past. Jewish theologians in the past, using the covenants that the Lord promised to them, taught that God blesses those who obey and judges those who disobey. Consequently, in their theology, anyone who was prosperous had to be right with the Lord and those who are in poverty had to be in punishment of the Lord. The Prosperity Gospel teachers, like Kenneth Copeland, Joyce Meyer, Benny Hinn, and Joel Osteen, subscribe the same theology.

This question seems logical to those who try hard to walk with the Lord and do what is right in His sight, but they struggle in their everyday life because of their difficult life. In the meanwhile, the wicked are doing just fine. They wine and dine in their luxurious mansions and whatever they touch become gold. Jeremiah considered that the wicked could not enjoy any prosperity or pleasure unless God allowed it.

This is one of those questions that is easy to ask, but very hard to answer. God's answer to Jeremiah's question was not something he expected. Rather than focusing on the wicked and their future, the Lord asked Jeremiah about himself. Most of us, like Jeremiah, want to know, "How can we get out of this?" when we go through difficult time. But the Lord wants us to think deeply and ask a different question: "What can we get out of this?"

The easy life produces a shallow and fragile character, but the difficult life challenges us to develop "spiritual muscles and stamina" and accomplish more for the Lord. It is the answer that Jeremiah needed to hear, not necessarily wanted. Ministry of serving God and His people happens in the boot camp, not in a five-star hotel.

As we grow older physically, we'd prefer less challenges and less changes. Without challenge, our spiritual maturity becomes stifle, without change, we become self-centered more than God-centered. The Lord wanted Jeremiah to be challenged and changed for the better and He expects us to be the same.

D. THE HEART OF THE MATTER IS THE MATTER OF THE HEART

Jeremiah 13:1-11 Thus the Lord said to me: "Go and get yourself a linen sash, and put it around your waist, but do not put it in water." 2 So I got a sash according to the word of the Lord, and put it around my waist. 3 And the word of the Lord came to me the second time, saying, 4 "Take the sash that you acquired, which is around your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole in the rock." 5 So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as the Lord commanded me. 6 Now it came to pass after many days that the Lord said to me, "Arise, go to the Euphrates, and take from there the sash which I commanded you to hide there." 7 Then I went to the Euphrates and dug, and I took the sash from the place where I had hidden it; and there was the sash, ruined. It was profitable for nothing. 8 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 9 "Thus says the Lord: 'In this manner I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. 10 This evil people, (1) who refuse to hear My words, (2) who follow the dictates of their hearts, and (3) walk after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be just like this sash which is profitable for nothing. 11 For as the sash clings to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling to Me,' says the Lord, 'that they may become My people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they would not hear.'

The Lord wanted to give Jeremiah an object lesson by using a sash that was usually used by the high priest and the regular priest. It was a sign of dignity and nobility.

When Jeremiah followed the Lord's instruction to dig out the sash from the rock, it was obviously soiled and ruined. The sash was representing Judah, that turned to Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon for help, instead of turning to the Lord. This help didn't really help them. It was good for nothing, because with the foreign help, the more idolatrous influence came to the kingdom and alienated the people further from the Lord and brought the kingdom to ruin.

In v10, NIV, NASB, and NLT translate it better than NKJV or KJV. Instead of 'dictates' or 'imagination', 'stubbornness of their hearts' is the right translation.

We see the clear steps of self-ruin by these ancient Israelis, which we must learn from in v10:

1) Who refuse to hear My words – By their own choice, they didn't want to be guided by God's commandments and shunned His instruction. By doing so, they stepped out of light into darkness.

2) Who follow the dictates of their hearts – They became stubborn in their hearts and put their carnal desires before what the Lord wanted.

3) Walk after other gods to serve them and worship them – When they stopped listening to God and started following their own hearts, it led them to the corruption of idolatry. What a perfect recipe for self-destruction! How many fellow Christians ended up on this path?!?! May we never walk in this path.

E. APPLICATIONS

- 1) It is far more important for us to do our worship and service to the Lord with the right reason for the Lord than to impress the people around us.
- 2) Our Amen to the Lord should be more than a mere acknowledgement, it should be more than a half-hearted agreement. It should be a fully accepted embrace from our heart for whatever the Lord choose to do.
- 3) Ministry of serving God and His people happens in the boot camp, not in a five-star hotel.