

“Journeys and Destinations – Just As It Was Written”

Pastor Wally Contreras

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“The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, “After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.’ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.” (Acts 15:6-21)

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Pastor Wally said that this first council was a pivotal point in the church’s history to address if salvation comes from first being made “Jewish” by being circumcised and following the laws of Moses, or not. Why was (and is) this matter of such great import that a council of the church’s leadership was necessary and “much debate” needed to be had on the topic? Explain.

What important matters are normally discussed and debated during church meetings of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and why?

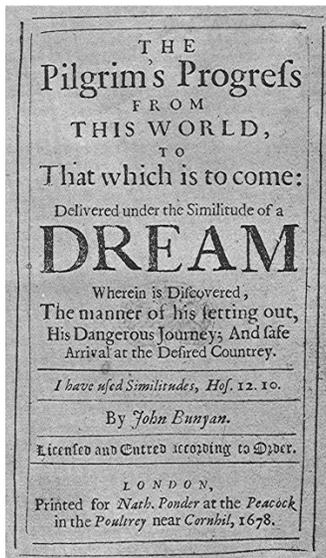
Consider the following situation reported in the “News & Observer” February 24, 2021 article by Mike Stunson: “Churches in Kentucky and Georgia were removed by the Southern Baptist Convention on Tuesday (February 23, 2021) for allowing members with pro-LGBTQ beliefs into their congregations. The decision to disfellowship St. Matthews Baptist Church in Louisville and Towne View Baptist Church in Georgia was made by the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention. Albert Mohler, leader of the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, said on Twitter the removals were “necessary and proper.” St. Matthews Baptist Church was stripped from the Kentucky Baptist Convention in 2018 for supporting hiring LGBTQ employees, the Louisville Courier-Journal reported. The church said at the time that it was “disheartened” by the decision, WLKY reported. Michael Payne, chairperson of the St. Matthews

Baptist Church Administrative Council, said the belief that “Jesus as personal Savior is the sole criterion for membership” in the church led the Southern Baptist Convention to cut ties, according to The Associated Press. Towne View Baptist Church pastor Jim Conrad confirmed his church’s expulsion Tuesday, but said the church will not change its views. “The Southern Baptist Convention has decided that we are no longer welcome in their membership because we have welcomed LGBTQ members into our membership,” Conrad said in a statement. “It is our commitment to share the love of Jesus with everyone and welcome anyone who professes faith in Christ into our community of faith, hope, and love.” When Towne View accepted a gay couple into its membership in 2019, the church lost 30% of its congregation, Conrad said, according to the Baptist Press. He said that “anyone who can profess Jesus as Lord should be welcomed into our church.”...Mohler said the Old Testament and the New Testament addresses homosexuality. “Anyone who argues that the Bible — OT and NT — is not clear about the sinfulness of homosexuality is either very confused or deliberately dishonest about the structure of biblical theology and the clear meaning of texts,” he said on Twitter. Two other churches — Antioch Baptist Church in Sevierville, Tennessee, and West Side Baptist Church in Sharpville, Pennsylvania, were expelled Tuesday from the Southern Baptist Convention for employing convicted sex offenders.” What do I personally and we, as a church, believe regarding this matter and why?

Peter asked why some within the council were “putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear”. Pastor Wally likened it to telling a child to clean his or her room and then adding “and take out your trash” and “make your bed” and “pick up your clothes”, etc. The Mishnah was an oral tradition of commentary on the Mosaic Law that introduced additional, man-made rules that “built a fence” around the Mosaic Law so people wouldn’t even come close to breaking God’s commandments. For example, concerning Sabbath observance, the Mishnah lists 39 primary kinds of labor that were not allowed on the Sabbath day. It was counted as Sabbath breaking to look in a mirror fixed to the wall or to light a candle. These same regulations however, permitted an egg laid on the Sabbath to be sold to a Gentile and allowed for a Gentile to be hired to light a candle or a fire. The Pharisees were concerned with keeping these additional commandments and especially with having the outward appearance of keeping them. Jesus’s critique of the Pharisees was that they were legalistic – only concerned with the external appearance of keeping the Law rather than the inward spirit of the Law. Read Matthew 23:27-28. In your opinion, what defines a modern-day Pharisees? Explain.

Do people of today find legalism and rule-following appealing? If so, how so? If not, why not?

The Lord teaches that regarding Sabbath rules, whatever draws us closer to Him, helps us to understand His will, and leads to the happiness and well-being of others—this would be true Sabbath observance (see Isaiah 58:13 and Matthew 12:1-13). What does my Sabbath look like and why?



Pastor Wally spoke of a passage in “The Pilgrim’s Progress” written by John Bunyan (not Paul Bunyan the giant lumberjack and Babe, the Blue Ox): “Now I saw in my dream, that the highway which Christian was to go was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Up this way therefore did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and said with a merry heart, “He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death.” Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that

the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks. Now as he stood looking and weeping, behold, three Shining Ones came to him, and saluted him with “Peace be to thee.” So the first said to him, “Thy sins be forgiven thee;” the second stripped him of his rags, and clothed him with change of raiment; the third also set a mark on his forehead, and gave him a roll with a seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the celestial gate; so they went their way. Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing: Thus far did I come laden with my sin; Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in, Till I came hither; what a place is this! Must here be the beginning of my bliss? Must here the burden fall from off my back? Must here the strings that bound it to me crack? Blest cross! blest sepulchre! blest rather be The man that there was put to shame for me.” Pastor Wally said that Jesus is the burden taker...the burden bearer. (“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30) Am I tend to be more of a “burden giver”, surrendering my burdens to Him, or a “burden holder” and why?

Discuss Pastor Wally’s assertion that the error of man does not cancel the truth of God.

A.W. Tozer once said “Everywhere among Conservatives we find people who are Bible-taught, but not Spirit-taught. They conceive truth to be something which they can grasp with the mind. If a man holds to the fundamentals of the Christian faith—then he is thought to possess divine truth. But that is an incorrect assumption. The Bible is a supernatural book—and can be understood only by supernatural aid!...We need to learn that truth consists not in correct doctrine—but in correct doctrine plus the inward enlightenment of the Holy Spirit...Scripture truths must be experienced—before we can really know them.” Pastor Wally said that “God is the author of all Scripture; thus, it has authority over all, especially those in Christ.” In what way(s) have I “experienced” His authority in my life?