

Common Knowledge And The Scriptures

What we usually refer to as “common knowledge” is often “common” (shared), but is rarely “knowledge” (true or factual). Perhaps this is nowhere more evident than in regard to “common knowledge” of the Scriptures. Perhaps a few examples will help to illustrate the point. Many have said or believed such “common knowledge” precepts as:

“Cleanliness is next to godliness.” I suspect this was first introduced by, and rapidly became “common knowledge” to, mothers who struggled to keep their families clean. However, this well-known adage is not in the Scriptures (sorry moms!). Perhaps the closest biblical text dealing with this issue can be found in Matthew 15:1-20. Here, Pharisees (a hypocritical and self-righteous sect of the Jews during Christ’s time) accused Jesus’ disciples of violating God’s Law because they ate with unwashed hands (v. 2). Rather than condemning His disciples, Jesus instead indicts the Pharisees for adding their own requirement to God’s Law (since God never said it). He went on to say that spiritual defilement didn’t come from such external things, but the internal uncleanness of the heart (vv. 17-20). Given that God’s thoughts and ways are much higher than our own (Isaiah 55:8-9), we should all pay attention to what God has actually said, and stop adding to it or taking from it: “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19).

“If we would just keep the Ten Commandments, everything would be better and we could all go to heaven.” What do the Scriptures actually say? The Ten Commandments were given to Jewish people (direct physical descendants of Abraham) living in the time period between the giving of the Law of Moses at Mt. Sinai and the cross of Jesus (cp. Exodus 19:1-8; Hebrews 9:15-17). Though most of the Ten Commandments are repeated in, and thus made a part of, the Law of Christ (the New Testament), the Law of Moses (the Old Testament) was actually only given to the nation of Israel living during that time period (Deuteronomy 5:1-3, 15). In fact, Jewish Christians in the region of Galatia who tried to appeal to the Law of Moses were told they had “fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4). So, we can’t “go to Heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments.” God invested His power to save in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16), not the Ten Commandments.

“The truth shall set you free.” This is often quoted in a multitude of circumstances, but is probably not true in most applications typically implied. Although the quote does come from the Bible, this is not all of it. The full sentence of Jesus, recorded in John 8:31-32, is, “If you abide in My word, then are you truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” The freedom of which Jesus spoke is spiritual freedom from the consequences of eternal damnation, not the various applications usually made. Furthermore, this spiritual freedom was not based solely on the truth itself. Jesus began the sentence with “if”. The truth only sets us free “if” we meet the

conditions stated in the rest of the sentence. Note that Jesus said one must: “abide in My word” (be obedient to it), and thus become a “disciple” of His (a follower or a Christian), by “know(ing) the truth” (can’t obey or follow without knowledge) in order to be made “free” by the truth. So the “truth” that makes one “free” is the word of Jesus that is known, obeyed, and followed! Anything less doesn’t result in spiritual freedom.

“Jesus is the reason for the season.” The birth of Jesus was certainly a momentous event in human history. Do you really know why? God is eternal and thus cannot die. Since God planned and desired to “give His only begotten Son” to shed His blood as a sacrifice for our sins, Jesus would need a human body — one that could die (Ephesians 1:3-7). Thus, Jesus became God in the flesh: “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). So far, so good — but, despite being “common knowledge” that Jesus was born on December 25th, and that we’re supposed to celebrate Christmas to remember and honor His birth, the Bible does not say either of these things. God knows how to tell time and read a calendar, but chose not to reveal the date of Jesus’ birth. And, neither God nor Jesus, or the Holy Spirit-inspired writers of the New Testament, ever intimated that Christians should memorialize Christ’s birth. However, we are told to memorialize His death, which His birth obviously enabled: “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26:28-29). This New Testament Christians did on the first day of every week as the Jesus and the Holy Spirit taught (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:18-34).

There is nothing necessarily wrong with cleanliness, the Ten Commandments, the freedom that truth provides, or the celebration of “Christmas,” but let’s remember to read and practice what the Bible actually says, in the way that it says, rather than depending on “common knowledge.”

Adapted from Philip Strong