



Jesus and I Can't Both Be in Control!

Let me state a truth: A lot of people are saved but they don't know Jesus.

It's the only way I can understand why people who believe and teach the doctrine of the sovereignty of God are so bent on controlling everything but him...and sometimes even him. It's the only explanation I know for my condemnation, self-righteousness and arrogance. It explains why people talk about freedom yet live in a prison of guilt and fear. It helps me deal with those who talk about grace and give very little of it. It is the only way I know to understand why I, a teacher of grace, live a life that is sometimes marked by obsession with rules, being perfect and doing everything right. It explains why so many people have to be right and work so hard to appear good.

I don't for a moment believe that I'm not saved (contrary to what you might think); and, frankly, I don't really believe that those who drive me nuts with criticism and condemnation of other Christians aren't redeemed. I just believe that those of us who are saved sometimes don't know Jesus.

For many years, I followed Christ in a not dissimilar way to the way I followed the multiplication table. I knew that it was true. It didn't move me deeply, it didn't make me feel good all over and it didn't feel warm and fuzzy. During that period in my life, I simply didn't understand those who had an emotional connection with Christ. I, from my arrogant, self-righteous and superficial position of intellectual commitment, felt that they "needed" all that but all I needed was the truth.

"Just the facts, man, just the facts."

After all, once you see truth, you can't unsee it. Only a fool, once seeing it, refuses to live according to the truth one has seen.

As I look back, the problem was that I tried to make the Christian faith into an affirmation of propositions. It was intellectual assent, and I thought that was enough. It wasn't...not nearly enough.

In the last century a New England man in Amherst, Massachusetts proposed to his wife this way: "I hope I have no foolishness called romance; I am too well-balanced for that sort of nonsense. But we might look forward to leading respectable and useful lives and enjoy the respect of the neighbors."

If you think that was a good marriage proposal, there's something weird about you, and everybody knows it. But, if you believe something like that about your relationship to Christ and even teach it, making the Christian faith into a "respectable and useful" religious commitment, everybody will think you're godly. You're not. You're spiritually neurotic.

Surrendering Control

I'm not preaching at you—I've been there, and God help me, still live there sometimes. It's having it in your head but having trouble getting it into your heart. I don't know if I have all the answers. I do have at least one of them though.

With me, I think, the real problem was (and sometimes still is) control. In my need to control my situation, my church and all the circumstances of my life, I was saved, but I didn't know Jesus.

You see, you can analyze, teach and line up doctrines and propositions. There is something logical and proper about biblical theology. Apologetics will not only win arguments; it makes one feel secure in one's rightness. On the other hand, trusting our heart, listening to your heart and acting on your heart's reasons can get you into all sorts of trouble. Once you start

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he asked me to remind you

going down the road to the heart, you can't control what happens. Not only that, there is something ...well...uh...you know...kind of crude about all that emotional stuff.

Am I saying that biblical doctrine isn't of any consequence? Am I suggesting that what Francis Schaeffer called "true truth" isn't true or, if it is, it isn't all that important?

Are you crazy? Of course not!

I am, however, saying that all of those things have one purpose: To point you to Christ so that he will love you and empower you to serve and to enjoy him.

Let me share the wonderful passage of Luke 9:57-62 with you:

"As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you where you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord let me first go and bury my father.' and Jesus said to him, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' Yet another said, 'I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those of my home.' Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

Jesus isn't teaching that there is something wrong with caring about having a place to lay your head, about burying your relatives or about taking care of your loved ones.

Jesus is talking about control.

Of course, one isn't going to let go of the control of anything until one can trust the One to whom one is giving control. And that's why I'm always saying things like:

- God isn't angry at you.
- He is quite fond of you.
- He isn't a child abuser.
- Go to him and he won't reject you.
- He's not surprised at anything you do.
- It isn't your sin; it's your stiffness.

- If you never get any better, he will still love you.

How do I know all that? Well, of course, I know that because the Bible tells me so. I don't really know it until I test it, though, and I have over and over again. Go ahead and test it.

Sin Boldly

For instance, go sin so that you have something to repent of and, when you sin, sin boldly (and no, I'm not advocating sin...because you will anyway). Besides, those were direct quotes from Martin Luther. So, if you're going to get mad at someone, get mad at him. After all, he's dead and it doesn't matter. Then see if Jesus forgives you.

Make a fool of yourself at church; laugh at an inappropriate time; dance in a Presbyterian church; shout "Amen" in the middle of the Anglican liturgy; admit you're wrong to someone who really ticks you off; offend someone with your views; love someone nobody else can stand; do something improper; cuss, spit and...

...Okay, okay, maybe that is a bit much.

You get the idea. Quit trying to be so right, so good and so ...well...in control. You're covered by the blood of Christ.

You see, you and Jesus can't both be in control.

When I've been in control, he still loved me and I was saved, but it felt like he was avoiding me. When I clung to my doctrines, and my need to be right, good and in control, Jesus allowed me to do that.

However, when I decided that I didn't have to be in control anymore and, as it were, "let the dead bury their dead," I found that Jesus came and spoke to my heart deeply and profoundly.

And not only that. When was the last time you were hugged by or danced with a doctrine... no matter how true it was?

He asked me to remind you. ☐

—Steve Brown