

The Overriding Issue

By

Curtis Dickinson

Important issues multiply daily to the extent that the most conscientious are overwhelmed by the number of causes which they must place in proper perspective and upon which they are expected to take a stand.

In the ministry of Christ He not only raised issues but instructed His disciples by example and teaching on how to meet and respond to each one. Clearly He was at conflict with the society of the day. Sharp divisions existed over politics, social reform, race relations and religion. Opposition to Christ was increasing among the priests and Pharisees when He raised the issue of His identity. “Who say you that I am?” Peter answered that He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. It was immediately after this that “Jesus began to show unto His disciples that He must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up” (Matt. 16:21). Peter needed no time to deliberate this issue. “Be it far from you, Lord,” he blurted, “This shall never be unto you.” The cause of Christ must prevail, but not at the cost of His own life. Jesus said to Peter, “Get thee behind me Satan, thou art a stumbling block to me: for you mind not the things of God but the things of men... If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what shall a man be profited if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his life? For the son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds” (Matt. 16:24–27).

THE THINGS OF GOD. From the human point of view it was noble and just for Peter to defend his Lord against death. It is said that the first law of nature is to preserve one’s life. To think of health and the comforts of life is to mind the things of men. While health and comfort in themselves are good they are not necessarily essential to the overall purpose of God, and in the case of Christ they actually stood in the way of God’s plan.

The will of man is to do his own will and he is continually searching for the means to do it. From the common viewpoint it is illogical that he should sacrifice his own will in accomplishing that which it is his desire to attain, for this desire is to have his own will done. He will readily sacrifice whatever is necessary to accomplish his will, but this sacrifice must not include giving up his own personal desire; that is, sacrificing his will nor sacrificing his life. He is facing the multitude of issues in the world on the basis of saving his life temporarily, and blocking out the basic issue of God’s purpose and eternal life.

One who minds the things of God is not concerned with temporal successes nor in seeing that his own finite will is done, but is concerned with the eternal and the will of God.

FINDING LIFE. There is no profit in settling all issues of the world if in the end one must forfeit his own life. This is the overriding issue: eternal life. It is the issue which Christ came into the world to settle.

When He said that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer and be killed He was but setting forth in the simplest terms the point at which the eternal purpose of God is manifested to man and accomplished for man — the death of Christ to ransom man from his sin that he might not perish but be salvaged to live forever. With God sin is absolutely heinous and intolerable and deserves the punishment of death. All have sinned, and thus all are justly under the sentence of death. The only way out of this dead-lock is by Christ's death in man's stead so that man can be resurrected to life.

This is God's plot for the working out of His eternal purpose for man. It is revealed precisely and clearly. Christ's teaching, parables and illustrative actions of cleansing and healing all focus on the issue of life in the resurrection. It is the focal point of the Mosaic order of worship, of the prophets and of the apostolic letters.

If the issue is not settled, then there is no point in striving through all life's difficulties (I Cor. 15:19). When it IS settled (in accordance with God's revealed word) then there is peace, relaxation and freedom, because all of life moves toward the eternal goal.

Could there possibly be any other issue so great as to be resolved by the suffering and death of the holy and innocent Son of God? Can one imagine that God ever sees any issue that even comes close to comparing with this issue of saving man from ultimate, final and irrevocable death? If this is the great issue with God, and if it is so important that He was willing to give His only begotten Son, does it not follow that mere man would be willing to deny self and even give up his mortal life that he might attain that which Christ Himself was willing to die for? Gaining a great fortune would be an important issue; gaining millions of dollars is of such import that men continually kill, defraud and destroy in order to obtain; certainly gaining the whole world must be the greatest issue of all, and yet Jesus said that it would be no profit to a man who would at the last day have to forfeit his life.

THE EVASION. God's purpose is eternal. It is fixed. It will never be different. It was in His thinking before He created the world, so it is called an "eternal purpose." God is carrying it out in our world today. The death of Christ was an integral part of that purpose and was essential for it to be fulfilled. Ultimately, Christ will come in judgment, and after the smoke is cleared away God's eternal purpose will have been fulfilled in the creation of anew world including only those who are redeemed by Christ. No wonder men are so anxious to bring about change. If a change in any part of the plot can be made, then the whole process breaks down and there need be no final accounting.

The exploding issues of our day are focused on change. For example, a fierce struggle is underway to change God's order for the home. Gloria Steinem, editor of MS magazine and a leader in the women's liberation movement and the ERA said, "For the sake of those who wish to live in equal partnership we have to abolish and reform the institution of legal marriage." Certainly this means to change the laws of God in our most intimate relationships. In a little booklet called "The Document, A Declaration Of Feminism," published in support of women's lib, is this gem: "the end of the institution of marriage is a necessary condition for the liberation of women." In another place it says, "With the destruction of the nuclear family must come a new way of looking at children. They must be seen as a responsibility of the entire society rather than of individual parents." Change is necessary in order that man may do his own will and escape the responsibility to do the will of God. The goal is reached by certain steps, but

by changing the intermediate steps, man thinks to escape the final reckoning. He deliberately evades the overriding issue of life/death. In doing so he blocks out the purpose of it all and struggles aimlessly, his frustrations mounting the farther he gets from the Creator's purpose.

IN FOCUS. From the revealed viewpoint of God, all mankind in his natural state is unworthy of eternal life because of the change which took place with Adam and Eve at their sin and because of the sin which man continually commits. All of God's relationship to man from the beginning has been focused upon this issue, to make man sinless again that he might be salvaged from the ultimate destruction of the creation, to live in a joyful fellowship with God and all his other subjects. Every issue must be questioned in the light of this overriding issue: the salvaging of man for God's eternal purpose. The issue is of such magnitude that nothing should be allowed to keep one from taking a firm stand on the side of God's eternal purpose, and his own eternal salvation. As Jesus said, one should even be willing to lose his mortal life for the sake of gaining eternal life. If he truly believes in Christ and therefore wants to follow Him he will be willing to deny himself, to sacrifice all other purposes, to sacrifice his own personal self-will in order that he might do the will of God and submit to the ultimate and final eternal purpose of God.

In spite of the fact that over 50 percent of the population of this country claims a relationship with a church it is obvious that there is a great deal of confusion in the minds of these people concerning the issues that confront us. Vast numbers of Christians are wasting their energies on peripheral issues. This is not to say that the question of right and wrong is not involved in most all issues. But the whole effort is wasted if one stands on the wrong side of the overriding issue, and perishes at the last day.

"For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds" (Matt. 16:27). Jesus had not even finished His earthly ministry, had not gone to the cross, had not been raised from the dead and had not ascended to the Father; yet He was concerned with the fact of His coming again in judgment. Since we are almost two millenniums closer to the day of His coming again it is at least as important an issue as it was in that day. The efforts of men to change God's basic purpose, especially in the family and in basic sexual roles, have reached a fever-pitch in these days, indicating man's last-ditch effort to evade the purpose of God in order to have his own will done. Such high-handed rebellion can only bring judgment to a nation and to a world.

Whatever the financial woes of our community or our business and whatever the issues involved with city hall or with government, they must not be allowed to side-track us or blind us to the overriding issue of salvation through Jesus Christ. All the plagues that we suffer and that we read about throughout the world are but the forerunners of that final plague of death in the day of Christ's judgment. Jesus still says, "If any man would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me...For what shall a man be profited if he shall gain the whole world and forfeit his life?"

.....
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries.
Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute
Curtis' articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article
for permission to be valid. Vol. XVII, Number 9.
.....