

Christianity is Not a List of Dos and Don'ts?

by Sebastian R Fama

Many in the crowd nodded approvingly as the speaker said: "Christianity is not a list of dos and don'ts. It is a relationship with the living God." The statement was true, but very misleading. Yes, Christianity does not consist of people merely adhering to a list of rules. And yes, we are called to have a personal relationship with our Lord. But that does not mean that there are no rules. Jesus made that clear in His Sermon on the Mount. He said:

For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:18-19).

The "not a list" statement, is a compressed version of the Protestant doctrine of "Assurance of Salvation." They believe that once you have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, you have eternal salvation. There is no sin that you can commit that can change that.

They further contend that if we were required to do anything, it would constitute works salvation. Christ did it all they would say. Our own efforts are worthless when it comes to salvation. That is true. But it doesn't go far enough. The works in question are accomplished by the grace of God (Philippians 4:13) and not by the strength or goodness of the individual. Therefore, we do not earn our salvation. But we are rewarded for allowing Jesus to work through us. If at any point we decide to turn from Christ, salvation can be lost (1 Corinthians 4:2-5).

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus told His apostles: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Since we know that Jesus taught many things, we can confidently assume that his teachings would comprise a list.

The Bible uses the analogy of a marriage to describe our relationship with Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:2). When Israel worshiped idols, God referred to it as marital infidelity (Jeremiah 3). Any marriage, by its very nature, carries with it a list of dos and don'ts. Spouses are to remain faithful to one another. There are duties that need to be undertaken for the good of the couple and any children that come along. But that wouldn't be enough. The ideal marriage would also include caring and intimacy. In short, a personal relationship.

Husbands and wives obey the rules of marriage out of love, not some legalistic standard. And as the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2) it is only fitting that we "observe all that Jesus commanded" out of love for Him. Jesus literally said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). By contrast, He reprimanded the Pharisees who did it for legalistic reasons (Luke 11:42).

So, according to Scripture, it is not rules or relationship. It is rules and relationship. And that would involve a list, a list of dos and don'ts.