

Shiloh United Methodist Church

Deuteronomy 23:12-14 Rev. Tyler Amundson

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Half Truths: God Said It, I Believe It, That Settles It

Video -

<https://www.facebook.com/shilohbillings.church/videos/1717022464986558/>

There are several phrases that are associated with the Bible, phrases that are said at different times in our culture to evoke faith, and yet they are not in the scriptures anywhere. Each of these phrases has the power to both endear people to our faith and frighten others away. Over the next 5 weeks we will be exploring some of these phrases, seeking God's presence in them, and dispelling the pieces of them that cause harm to others in the faith journey.

So today: "God Said It, I Believe It, That Settles It"

This phrase has been popular among Christians for a long time. It is something I haven't heard as often in my ministry career, but I have heard plenty of phrases that mean the same thing. In fact, if you google "God Said It" it will quickly complete the rest of the phrase. As I was researching this phrase I also found some interesting Christian music videos from the 70s around this very phrase. One was so unique I would like to share it with you all:

Watched Video found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=924MCB12MfA>

I have say I think some of the hairstyles might be coming back, I don't know about the polyester suits, but you never know.

The half-truth of this statement comes from its use as a blanket phrase to stop all conversation. Especially this is used when people want to stop the conversation, instead of exploring with each other to understand where God's will might be in different situations.

There is nothing in particular wrong with short phrases like this, I call them bumper sticker phrases, to help us in our faith. Adam Hamilton the author of these series states phrases like, "Jesus loves you" or "God is with you" are examples of this." They remind us of God's presence and grace in our lives. The challenge with these phrases is they are not the end of our faith, a faith that intertwines and supports our lives and our connection with God.

Our scripture today comes from Deuteronomy 23. If you don't know where the book of Deuteronomy is in the Bible, it comes right after Exodus and is attached to the Moses story. Moses offered a law the Hebrew people and Deuteronomy is part of the law and additional laws added by the leaders of the people. It is known as the covenant that binds the people to God.

Deuteronomy 23:12-14 Common English Bible (CEB)

¹² The latrines must be outside the camp. You will use them there, outside the camp.¹³ Carry a shovel with the rest of your gear; once you have relieved yourself, use it to dig a hole, then refill it, covering your excrement.

¹⁴ Do these things because the Lord your God travels with you, right in the middle of your camp, ready to save you and to hand your enemies over to you. For this reason, your camp must be holy. The Lord must not see anything indecent among you, or he will turn away from you.

If you were alive about 140 years ago you would have heard a rash of sermons on this text back in the 1880s¹ You see indoor plumbing was the new invention of the day. Many preachers took this passage to mean

¹ Hamilton, A. (2016). *Half truths: God helps those who help themselves and other things the Bible doesn't say*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. Pg. 105.

that God did not think we should relieve ourselves inside our homes. The understanding they went by was that based on this passage, God did not want to see anything unclean. Though using the bathroom is a natural part of who we are, it was an unclean act according to the law. It was feared that if we used indoor restrooms we might lose God's blessing in our lives and his presence with us.²

This particularly applied to indoor plumbing in churches. Churches were houses for God, so therefore churches must be where this passage in particular should be applied. Either in our homes or in church we must keep the outhouse to truly be people of God was the argument of the day. While this logic seems odd today, in its time it made sense to certain people who were used to certain things. And this is hardly the only challenging phrase in scripture.

If we were to take the phrases of scripture and apply the phrase, "God said it, I believe it, that settles it," as a complete truth then we would need to consider the following passages of scripture too.

Leviticus 19:19 Common English Bible (CEB)

¹⁹ You must keep my rules. Do not crossbreed your livestock, do not plant your field with two kinds of seed, and do not wear clothes made from two kinds of material.

In Leviticus 11 we would need to consider removing shrimp and pork from our diets.

Leviticus 19:27 Common English Bible (CEB)

²⁷ You must not cut off the hair on your forehead or clip the ends of your beard.

From Deuteronomy 21 we will learn that if our children are rebellious we as parents are ok to have our children put to death by stoning them.

² Hamilton, A. (2016). *Half truths: God helps those who help themselves and other things the Bible doesn't say*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. Pg. 110. (Adam Hamilton's list is more complete, I limited the list for time.)

Exodus 35:2 Common English Bible (CEB)

² Do your work for six days, but the seventh day should be holy to you, a Sabbath of complete rest for the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath will be put to death.

Adam Hamilton shares in *Half Truths* about a young man in his congregation who wants to get a tattoo. However, his father keeps quoting Leviticus 19:28, which would not allow it. So the young man cleverly looked up the verse and then read the verse before it. The verse before it has rules for how to trim beards and hair. He cited the scripture back to his father to remind him that he can't get the hair on the side of his head cut when he goes to the barber.³

Mark 2:27 Common English Bible (CEB)

²⁷ Then he said, "The Sabbath was created for humans; humans weren't created for the Sabbath.

As Christians, we have named that our call is to follow Jesus, and from this statement in Mark you can see that Jesus did not do scripture in a "God said it, I believe it, that settles it" sort of way. This is not the only place either, Jesus reinterprets the law for the Pharisees and religious elders throughout his ministry.

In one of the churches I served a man came to me holding this cross. He sat down in my office and we talked for a while. Then, reluctantly he pulled the cross out and placed it on my desk. He said I need to tell you a story. He then shared a story with me about how when he was a young boy he was with a group of friends. They went into a store and for some reason, one of those teenage reasons he felt like it would be cool to steal something. In this case, a cross seemed extra dangerous and daring. So he did.

The man in my office I had known for over 20 years, and he was now retired, so for more than 40 years he had carried this cross and

³ Hamilton, A. (2016). *Half truths: God helps those who help themselves and other things the Bible doesn't say*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. Pg. 110

apparently guilt with him. He said, “I am giving this cross to you as a way of absolving my guilt.” He knew there was no way to return that cross in reality, to the one he had taken it from. As we wrapped up the conversation I asked if this had been eating on him. And he said, “Yes and especially since in the ten commandments we aren’t supposed to steal.”

This is a man I consider my elder because he has taught me things, and because he quite literally is older than me. However, I think it is attitudes in the church like “God said, I believe it, that settles it” that has kept him and others in our churches, or those leaving our churches from connecting with God. They can’t find a way to really get past the rule based theology put in front of them and find what we know to be God’s grace and God’s spirit that brings us to the goodness and love filled living we know in Jesus Christ.

This half-truth phrase today is overly simplistic when it comes to interpreting scripture, and as a reminder this is not found anywhere in scripture. We know from Jesus that scripture is not just interpreted one way, instead a variety of things have to be considered. In the United Methodist tradition, we believe scripture is primary, but that it is not completely interpreted with tradition, reason, and experience being added to the puzzle of the message. Tradition being things like interpreting it through the teachings of other people and considering that our scripture are written in Hebrew and Greek. Translating out texts from other languages means that mistakes are made and that sometime people put their own agenda in the translations. Reason in our understanding means that there is wisdom unearthed and provided by God in other writings, and thought in our world and this too must be considered. In the 1940s and 50s we uncovered older versions of the biblical texts in the Dead Sea scrolls than had ever been read before, this brought new light to many of our translated English scriptures. Experience means we believe the experience of wise people and of our own experience inform our understanding of God’s word.

Finally, the most important thing is the “I believe it phrase.” No one person gets the whole picture of God’s understanding, the teaching of the Holy Spirit should make that clear to us. The tongues of fire in Acts helped each of the disciples share the message of God in a different language as a way of demonstrating individuals don’t each get to share one specific understanding of the gospel with only a select group of people.

This week I invite you to work on understanding how you interpret God’s direction for your life. And as a way of looking at this I would like each of us to find a scripture that speaks to us this week. Then go a step deeper and see if you can ask a friend you trust, a pastor you know, or do some research to understand if the scripture means through work what you think it meant to you when you first read it.

It was about 2 years ago, in a new member orientation at my previous church. A man about my age asked me and the other pastor if we would stay and answer questions after the meeting. We did, and the final question was, “Do you have a Bible?” Over the next few years this man came to our church consistently, offered support to our ministries, and asked some of the best questions about scripture.

About a month ago he came to me and shared with me, that he while hiking at 7,000-8,000 feet in Montana on a mountain pass, read scripture with some friends and shared a love feast celebrating, a ritual honoring the life of Jesus. He let me know the Bible we gave him all those years back is helping him to live the Christian walk, more and more each day.

The scriptures are a powerful part of our faith, and the wisdom and guidance they provide make the Bible an invaluable part of our tradition. They guide us to Jesus, to God and the Holy Spirit and they are a reminder of God’s grace.

It is also the call of us as a Christian community to do the work of listening each to God’s word, and to each other. If we silence any voice

who has spent time in God's word and presence, we risk leaving behind the chance to hear God's voice. I share this with every group of people I serve. I believe God speaks through us, and that no one person has a corner on God's message to us. It takes us working with one another to hear a more complete picture of God's wisdom. Only when we provide space to listen to each other, the word and the world around us are we truly following the path of Jesus.

As we close today I would like to invite us into a moment of prayer.

God, you are a God of many colors and traditions. You reach through time and space to share a message of hope with each new generation. Thank you for your scriptures which offer us a way to reach back to your presence in Jesus, with the disciples, prophets and leaders of the past. Help us to wrestle with your presence in word like Jacob and you did at the river, Jabbok. That as a community of faith we can seek your will, your truth, love, and compassion for our lives.

We ask this in the name of your son, Jesus who offered us the path of Christian life, our way. Amen