

## RULES OF ENGAGEMENT



Over the last four years we have talked about a good many things on this website concerning Jesus Christ and how He relates to mankind. Even a quick review of the Old and New Testaments will reveal that God desires to be involved with the day-to-day lives of human beings. This is why Jesus came in human form to engage and redeem us. Human history is really the story of God's desire to help mankind out of its love affair with sin and death. Often I'll hear folks say that they believe the Bible to be the word of God because they see a pattern of truth about people. In other words God does not sugar coat our human propensity to constantly screw up. Yet what usually amazes me is the fact that His love and willingness to go to 'bat' for us goes totally against human reasoning. After all, my mother used to have a saying, "You made your bed, now sleep in it." She was referring to the fact that when I made a mistake I had to live with its consequences or learn how to fix them. God, on the other hand, sent His Son so that we do not have to live with the ultimate consequence of our sin, which is eternity in hell.

On some occasions God even plays favorites with people, and what should cost them dearly, He undertakes for them instead. Then there are other occasions in which I would look at someone and find God's life punishment for them harsh, even though they may escape hell. Looking at how our Lord deals with mankind cannot be done based on human understanding, but on God's rules of engagement alone.

Because of this many have said there cannot be a God or they want nothing to do with what they feel to be an arbitrary Being that dishes punishment as He sees fit. Unfortunately this understanding does not find any room for a God with a concept and intellect that exceeds His creation. In other words, if God does not fit into the box of human reasoning and understanding, He cannot be God. If you've spent any amount of time reading this site, you know I encourage you to read the Old and New Testaments and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you and guide you as you read. A number of years ago we looked at the supposed contradictions that many say the Bible contains. I always leave room for the atheists among you to think on your own and I have often challenged you to ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. After all, if He doesn't exist, what's the big deal? The boogey man isn't going to jump out and scare you. If Jesus does exist, He is capable enough to talk to you and lead you and guide you if you ask. If He doesn't, then it's no skin off your back.

In every war there are rules of engagement even if none seem to exist. One rule that I find offensive is 'kill or be killed.' Throughout history this has been a rule applicable to most wars. Lately though in the last 100 years or so mankind has tried to limit the killing to soldiers only and declared that they should wear uniforms to be identified. This would limit the number of civilians killed. But there are groups of militants that could care less about the civilians that they live among. It's not because they think the civilians will go to a better place

when they die, but because they themselves want to control civilians and the money and power associated with that control. Throughout Biblical history I've noticed the propensity by God to raise up nations that desire to shepherd their people, not control them. It's a rule of engagement of the Lord that cannot be denied. He will allow a nation that does not have this in its heart to become powerful for a time and season in order to bring about His greater plan and purpose. But eventually when a great power gets too big for its britches He has ways of letting their own immorality be their undoing. No country, not America, Israel or any other can escape these rules of engagement.

In the Old Testament there was a prophet named Jonah. Most school children will remember the story of him being swallowed by a great fish or whale. For those of you that may not remember the story, Jonah was requested by the Lord to go and preach to the capital of Assyria, which was Nineveh. (Assyria encompassed an area larger than modern day Syria, but the comparison in attitude and function of Assyria and Syria will hold true even for modern times.) Assyria was one of Israel's greatest enemies. Assyria was known for its brutality in dealing with dissenters and enemies alike. One story holds that she would pile the heads of them 200 high. If the human head on average is six to eight inches, that's a pretty tall wall. Whether my math is right or the story is folklore and legend, I think we can all agree that being one of ancient Assyria's enemies would not bode well if you walked through the capital declaring its destruction from a foreign deity if they did not repent. Your head would probably find its way to one of their wall-building projects. Yet this is exactly what God requires of the Prophet Jonah. No wonder he decided to take a more 'scenic' vacation by boat to anywhere other than Nineveh! What was God's reason for sending His prophet? "...Nineveh has more than a 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left and many cattle as well.

Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (Jonah 4: 11) Before God makes this statement the prophet chews Him out for saving such a wicked city which has slaughtered and killed so many. Why did Jonah say God did it? He said it was God's great compassion and mercy (Jonah 4:1-3) To our human intellect this looks like favoritism of the worst kind. Could it be that God saw something about these heathen that we as humans would not or could not see? The city's response to Jonah's preaching, even to the highest level of its king is no small feat. I doubt any city in America would have listened. In fact, I would put money on most American cities calling a news conference to laugh and ridicule such statements. But God knew something about these ancients that they didn't even know about themselves---they could listen to their enemies and learn a lesson all at the same time---and all that by not killing them! By reacting in this way they spared their own lives.

About 30 or 40 years before this time there is a wicked king in Israel named Ahab. You can read about his story in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles in the Old Testament. You can say a lot about Ahab but one thing you cannot say is that he is a stupid man. Among many evil kings of Israel in the Old Testament, God deals with Ahab like He deals with none of the others. Throughout his story God gives him space to repent (1 Kings 21:20-29). But at some point it is hopeless and only God knows this. Ahab being quite smart decides he wants to attack a city, but hedging his bets he invites a good king from Judah to help him (at this point the Jewish kingdom is divided because of pride, with Israel as a whole worshiping foreign gods and Judah going through periods of Godly revival and decline). The good king from Judah (Jehoshaphat) wants to inquire of the Lord. Ahab assembles prophets from his particular brand of worship. Jehoshaphat wants a prophet dedicated solely to Yahweh. Ahab makes this statement: "There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never

prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah." (2 Chronicles 18:7) You can read the full story in 2 Chronicles 18, but to make it short, Micaiah shows up and in fact does not prophesy good concerning Ahab. What he does say is quite telling: "Micaiah continued, 'Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on His throne with all the host of heaven standing on His right and His left. And the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab king of Israel into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?' One suggested this and another that. Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, 'I will entice him.' 'By what means?' the Lord asked. 'I will go and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,' he said. 'You will succeed in enticing him,' said the Lord. 'Go and do it.' So now the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of these prophets of yours.' " The effects of Ahab's folly are felt by all whose lives he touched, including those in this story. It seems that those God puts in leadership are required to listen and obey, not just pay lip service. In fact even David, one of God's favorites learns this lesson the hard way. Actually, David doesn't do anything as silly as fight when he's not supposed to. All David does is count the army. God made some requirements not to do such a thing, but David does it anyway. (See the archives for 2003 for articles on this story) Seventy thousand souls lost their lives because of it. Some would say this was arbitrary on God's part. For those with that opinion, all I can say is that it would seem from those portions of Scripture (See 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21) that God's rules of engagement in this matter had to do with spiritual forces in the heavenlies that would have won the right to engage in battle and caused even greater disaster had God not taken action.

While these are Old Testament examples, it would seem from our New Testament, as well as the secular history surrounding it, that God is not above using an advanced and brutal empire to fulfill His plans, when mankind will choose no

other avenue but brutality. Whether humans like this fact or not, the rule here is that the "Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." (Psalm 24:1) After you make a cake, isn't that cake yours to do with as you please? Well, if the Scripture that "In the beginning God created the heavens and earth..." is true (Genesis 1:1) then it's His cake. If mankind wants brutality, God's not above using it to bring about peace and spiritual freedom. Daniel reveals and interprets a dream in the Old Testament for the future (Daniel 2) that many scholars feel unfolds a series of nations that ruled the earth. One of them is Rome. In Daniel's interpretation Rome is strong and brutal, made of iron. From secular history we know that to be true and we know that it was because of Rome's use of roads and transportation that the Gospel was able to go all over the world in a far more efficient and practical manner than at any time before that. We also know that because of Rome's descent into corruption and immorality it broke up into many different nations (which is how Daniel interprets the dream).

The Romans did not care for their people as shepherds would care for their sheep. They were a commodity to be used, not just for the betterment of the empire but for the betterment of a few rich and powerful or those who wanted their living conditions to become more rich and powerful. The media of its day employed a distraction by use of the games and bath houses. It's easy to see this as a precursor to our fascination with Hollywood and entertainment. The government as a whole was totally complicit in the use of this distraction, all the while proclaiming how much it was helping the common man. Of course, as long as the senators and other government officials enjoyed the benefit of power and post, education and spiritual purity could take a back seat. God help a religion like Christianity that tried to educate and be moral examples of what true freedom could look like. Under some emperors Christianity could quietly remain, but under the

most corrupt of the emperors both Christianity and Judaism were persecuted.

There are great lessons for us to learn from the Old and New Testaments and the secular history surrounding them. While America becomes distracted by entertainment and false heroes, China builds missiles that can devastate western technologies and hold them hostage. Of course, on the road to technological advancement China is polluting its environment and people, almost to the point of no return. Of course, if you're not a shepherding nation, with no desire for Yahweh (the word translated most often as LORD in the Bible), why care? There are always more people being born, so there is an endless supply to more of the commodity that you need to keep you in power. While politicians go on ad infinitum and ad nauseous about their ability to become the 'next great president' even though they have barely enough experience to run a football field, High-school kids want to emulate the same quick gratification that it takes to get ahead. They see some politicians parading around like movie stars getting away on 'easy street.' While those who are engaged in real service to God and country lose their lives to make a better world for everyone else. The training, hard work and apprenticeship that it takes to develop technology that not only protects us, but heals us and can make lives easier for many, go undiscovered because we have lost the value of hard work. Many parents teach their children the easy way out instead of a work ethic that may not provide instant pleasure. I'm thankful to the laboratory and scientists that discovered a way to work with embryonic stem cells that does not require the death of an embryo. We'll be able to see if the press surrounding their use will result in saved lives, without destroying new life. But look at all the fighting and nonsense we went through to reason with folks that there was a better way. Even with this new technology, recent laws have been passed to kill embryos any way, regardless of the discovery that we don't have to. I'm afraid

we might kill a child in order to save a few bucks. It's sort of like shooting ourselves in the foot to find a cure for lameness. Who knows that the next embryo we destroy might not be the child that finds a cure for the next case of worldwide plague? I'm not knocking Hollywood, China, politicians, America or anyone else. But the lesson we could all learn is that God requires an integrity that is truly found within the pages of the Old and New Testaments. It may take centuries of our time, but sooner or later when He's had enough, He's had enough. We are on borrowed time in this nation, along with many other nations around the world. We could all learn some lessons from God's past rules of engagement as He has dealt with other nations from an ancient history that so few read about any more. I truly believe that God wants the best for mankind. He has said so repeatedly (John 3:16 & 17). What we're about now, as a whole, is not God's best for mankind. Let's take a lesson from nations that have gone before us and mend our ways and get right with God. It's as easy as picking up a Bible and reading. If you need one, we snail mail them free of charge, just write. Log on next month for more.....