

Community Group Materials

Mark 9:30-50

21/22 May 2025

Tee

Does following a strict Sabbath Day make someone a better Christian? What about dress code? Or celebrating Christmas and Easter as opposed to ignoring them as pagan?

Task

In pairs, read either Romans 14:13-19 OR Colossians 2:16-23. What, do you think, is the difference between the letter of the law and the heart of the law? What does it mean to follow Christ with our hearts and not just our minds?

Target

Takeaway

The danger of pride

The disciples' argument about who was the greatest must be understood in the context of the honour/shame culture of the Greco-Roman world and the ancient Near East, where status within the community was among the highest of values and where servants and slaves had low status and few personal rights. In this context the disciples arrogantly argue over which of them deserves the greatest

honor in Jesus' coming kingdom (cf. 10:37). While Christian leaders today may not normally seek praise so openly or publicly, we all have subtle ways of asserting ourselves and seeking to increase our status in the eyes of others. Whether it is the athlete or actor who is given celebrity status or Christian leaders who are treated with deference everywhere they go, we as humans love the praise of others. Jesus responds by defining the true nature of Christian leadership. It is not about being first, but about being last and the servant of all. The essence of leadership is servanthood. While this has become something of a cliché in Christian circles, what is the essence of servant leadership? The role of the slave or servant in the first century was to meet the needs of the master, to do whatever was necessary to help that person succeed. It is the same in the church. Christian leadership is not about personal accolades or accomplishments but about equipping God's people to do the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12). It is about enabling others to be all that God has called them to be. Every pastor, teacher, ministry leader, and Christian parent is first and foremost a discipler, training others to live as servants and givers in a world of takers (2 Tim 2:2).

Causing others to stumble

Jesus warns about the severe judgment that will come on those who cause others—Jesus' "little ones"—to fall spiritually. His use of hyperbole is characteristic of the historical Jesus (e.g., a camel passing through the eye of a needle [10:25]; a plank protruding from one's eye [Matt 7:3–5], etc.). Here the hyperbole relates to the preference of cutting off one's own body parts to prevent spiritual stumbling, since it is better to enter eternal life maimed than to end up "whole" in Gehenna. The statements are obviously hyperbole: no one will enter eternal life maimed, and self-mutilation is never condoned in Scripture (though some church leaders took these commands literally; e.g., Origen castrated himself). The point, rather, is to warn of the severe consequences of practices that could cause spiritual catastrophe for oneself or for others and that drastic measures are in order to avoid this. The apostle Paul also has much to say in this regard. Both in 1 Cor 9 and in Rom 14, he speaks of his willingness to sacrifice anything in his life for the spiritual benefit of others. He will gladly give up his rights to hospitality, to remuneration, even to marriage in order to win others to Christ. To the Jews Paul would become a Jew, to win the Jews. To the Gentiles he became a Gentile in order to win them. "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor 9.22).